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ABSTRACT

The Making Connections initiative, which works to build strong families and strong neighborhoods in 22 cities, promotes an explicit communication policy to get the kind of support and involvement that can make a difference. This guide defines the principles and components of effective communication and shows how communicating can be a critical element of success. It presents an array of options for communicating and a framework for thinking strategically about choices. The guide defines communication broadly, asserting that community residents who are working to make their lives better are at the heart of a communication strategy. It addresses a wide array of ways to communicate with residents and other community leaders. The introduction discusses the ingredients of a comprehensive communication strategy and presents a framework to make it happen, noting that to be successful, communication activities and products must be diverse, involve multiple players and audiences, and build consensus through discussion and debate. The next two sections present potential requests, opportunities, and challenges as well as promising approaches and resources (with examples from seven cities). (SM)

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ED 475 880

Using Strategic COMMUNICATION to Support Families

A GUIDE TO KEY IDEAS, EFFECTIVE APPROACHES, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS CITIES AND SITE TEAMS

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part of a series from the Technical Assistance / Resource Center of The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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A list of Technical Assistance/Resource Center Resource Guides appears on the inside back cover.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for vulnerable children and families in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the foundation in honor of their mother.

Headquartered in Baltimore, the Foundation is the largest private foundation in the nation dedicated solely to the needs of vulnerable children and families, with assets of more than $3 billion. The Foundation's grants are intended to help states, cities, and neighborhoods improve the life chances of the millions of American children at risk of poor educational, economic, social, and health outcomes. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

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preface to family strengthening resource guides

Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods.

This simple premise underlies *Making Connections*, the centerpiece of a 10- to 15-year commitment by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to improving the life chances of vulnerable children by helping to strengthen their families and neighborhoods. The Foundation is working in 22 American cities to promote neighborhood-scale programs, policies, and activities that contribute to stable, capable families.

Making Connections seeks to help families raise healthy, confident, and successful children by tapping the skills, strengths, leadership, and resilience that exist in even the toughest neighborhoods. The initiative is founded on the belief that families and their children can succeed if the people who live, work, and hold positions of influence in distressed neighborhoods make family success a priority—and if there are deliberate and sustained efforts within the broader community and at the state level not only to connect isolated families to essential resources, opportunities, and supports, but also to improve the material conditions of the neighborhood.

The Foundation is dedicated to helping selected communities engage residents, civic groups, public and private sector leadership, and faith-based organizations in efforts to transform the toughest neighborhoods into family-supportive environments. *Making Connections* seeks to enable residents in these neighborhoods to live, work, play, earn decent wages, and interact with family, friends, neighbors, and social institutions in a safe, congenial, and enriching environment.

In order to improve the health, safety, educational success, and overall well-being of children, *Making Connections* is a long-term campaign aimed at helping selected cities build alliances and mobilize constituencies at the neighborhood level.

Making Connections has identified three kinds of connections essential to strengthening families:

- **Economic opportunities** that enable parents to secure adequate incomes and accumulate savings, thus assuring their families the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, and health care. To meet this need, communities must address job development, employment training, wage supplements, and asset-building strategies—all of which help ensure predictable incomes, which in turn bolster healthy child development.
- **Social networks** in the community, including friends, neighbors, relatives, mentors, community organizations, and faith-based institutions that provide neighbor-to-neighbor support and help family members feel more confident and less isolated.
- **Services and supports**, both formal and informal, public and private, which provide preventive as

MAKING CONNECTIONS CITIES

Atlanta	Milwaukee
Baltimore	New Orleans
Boston	Oakland
Camden	Philadelphia
Denver	Providence
Detroit	San Antonio
Des Moines	San Diego
Hartford	Savannah
Indianapolis	Seattle
Louisville	St. Louis
Miami	Washington, D.C.

well as ongoing assistance, and are accessible, affordable, neighborhood based, family centered, and culturally appropriate. These might include high-quality schools, health care, housing assistance, and affordable child care.

How will we know when Making Connections goals have been achieved?

Making Connections will have succeeded in a city when community leaders and residents have built a local movement on behalf of families that has the power and momentum to accomplish the following:

- Build on existing efforts and spur neighborhood-scale, family strengthening strategies that reduce family isolation by increasing their connections to critical economic opportunities, strong social networks, and accessible supports and services.
- Use these neighborhood-scale initiatives to rethink, revamp, and redirect policies, practices, and resources on a citywide scale to improve the odds that all families succeed.

As this movement grows, it will enable each city to know it is succeeding in a number of other ways:

- When parents have the means, confidence, and competence to provide for their families economically, physically, and emotionally;
- When residents have people to talk to and places to go for help, support, and camaraderie;
- When families feel safe in their homes and in their neighborhoods;
- When children are healthy, succeed in school, and go on to college or a job after high school;
- When communities offer the resources families need to pass on a legacy of literacy and opportunity to their children.

What do we mean by "family strengthening"?

Family strengthening policies, practices, and activities recognize the family as the fundamental influence in children's lives. These policies and practices both reinforce parental roles and messages and reflect, represent, and accommodate families' interests. Family strengthening means giving parents the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks, and supports to raise their children successfully, which includes involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet family needs.

A family's major responsibility is to provide an optimal environment for the care and healthy development of its members, particularly its children. Although basic physical needs—housing, food, clothing, safety, and health—are essential, children also need a warm emotional climate, a stimulating intellectual environment, and reliable adult relationships to thrive.

Threats to a family's ability to manage its responsibilities come from many sources: externally generated crises, such as a job or housing loss, or internal crises, such as child abuse or estrangement among family members. Unexpected events, such as the birth of a child with a disability or a teen's substance abuse problems, or more common events, like new jobs, marriages, deaths, and household moves, precipitate potentially destabilizing changes. The family's ongoing stability hinges on its ability to sustain itself through these disruptions. To help families cope effectively with crises and normal life events, communities need a variety of resources, including adequate and accessible services for children at all stages of their development, effective supportive services for families, and a critical mass of healthy families who can effectively support their neighbors.

Family strengthening policies and practices consider the whole family, not just individual family members. Often, agency protocols and programs

create tensions inadvertently when their focus excludes family needs. A striking example is a well-intentioned nutrition program arranged to ensure that homeless children were fed breakfast, lunch, and dinner at school. The children's parents and other siblings had no source of food, however, and the program participants had no opportunity to share meals with the rest of their families. Once the program leaders recognized the problem, parents and siblings were included in the school mealtimes, and the program designers learned to reconsider their strategies. Similarly, many welfare-to-work programs report difficulties in job retention because of family stresses—stresses often resulting from the jobs themselves. When a family member finds work, family rituals, logistical patterns, roles, and responsibilities change. More successful programs consider these disruptions ahead of time and develop ways to help the family cope.

What do we mean by "strengthening neighborhoods"?

Families must be helped to thrive within the context of their neighborhoods and broader communities. Job development, for example, should be coordinated with specific local or regional businesses, and community economic development should build on the resources of each unique neighborhood. Connecting families to economic opportunities can have a ripple effect: Just living in a neighborhood where a substantial number of families work can reinforce positive expectations for the children in the neighborhood.

Making Connections recognizes that the informal social networks that are most important to people (their friends, neighbors, faith communities, and clubs) almost always exist at the neighborhood level. Time and time again, these natural helping networks prove most important to families' abilities to raise their children successfully. One component of strengthening neighborhoods is thus to invest in the social capital provided by neighborhood-based networks. At the same time, *Making Connections* seeks to widen the networks that families have at their disposal, thereby broadening their aspirations, attitudes, and opportunities. Linking families to broader networks both within and outside their own neighborhoods promises to open up new possibilities for children and parents alike.

Finally, strengthening neighborhoods means placing formal public services in neighborhoods, and making them comfortable rather than intimidating for families. This requires redefining the jobs of public workers so that professionals from several separate mainline systems—as well as natural helpers or informal caregivers—work together in teams and are deployed to specific neighborhoods to take the necessary steps to help families succeed.

The Technical Assistance/Resource Center

The Foundation's Technical Assistance/Resource Center (TARC) seeks to connect people in the 22 cities to powerful ideas, skillful people and organizations, examples of what works in other communities, and opportunities to develop leadership skills in their own neighborhoods. It provides assistance to the 22 *Making Connections* cities on a range of topics, from building alliances that lead to stronger families in healthier, more stable communities, to diverse strategies that community leaders may pursue in terms of jobs, housing, safety, schools, and health care. TARC responds to the sites' priorities through a "help desk" approach, which seeks to meet sites' requests for assistance, and "peer consultation," where colleagues who have successfully addressed a particular problem help their peers in other communities to frame and solve a similar issue. In this way, *Making Connections* cities can capitalize on the practical knowledge that emerges from on-the-ground innovators.

One component of the Foundation's technical assistance strategy is a set of Resource Guides, including this one. The Resource Guides articulate the Foundation's perspective about issues pertaining to *Making Connections* sites, as well as summarize trends in the field, highlight effective examples, and point to people, organizations, and materials that can provide additional help. The Resource Guides are intended first for Foundation staff, in order to create a common fund of knowledge across a broad range of issues. Second, the guides are intended for residents and other leaders in *Making Connections* cities who may want to learn more about specific subjects.

The precise number of Resource Guides will fluctuate as demand changes, but approximately 15 guides will be produced by the end of 2001 (see the inside back cover for a list). All guides will address topics aimed at both supporting individual families and strengthening neighborhoods. The guides fall into four categories: (1) Economic Opportunities for Families, (2) Enhancing Social Networks, (3) Building High-Quality Services and Supports, and (4) Techniques for Advancing a Family Strengthening Agenda in Neighborhoods.

The guides in the first three categories address substantive areas in which activities can directly lead to better outcomes for children and families as well as strengthen neighborhoods. The first Economic Opportunity Resource Guide, on jobs, for example, provides information about how to connect low-income residents to regional and local labor markets, allowing families to provide for their basic necessities and contributing to family stability. Simultaneously, successful jobs initiatives fortify the neighborhoods in which they operate, making them more attractive places to live and providing strong incentives for younger residents to participate in the labor force.

Likewise, the Resource Guides in the second and third categories were chosen because they affect both individual families and their neighborhoods. For instance, the guide on housing is intended to help communities provide affordable housing to low-income families, which in turn leads to enhanced housing stock and more desirable neighborhoods. The guide on child care seeks to help communities develop plans for increasing the supply of affordable, quality child care—especially the notoriously hard-to-find care for infants and school-age children, and care during nontraditional work hours. Achieving this goal not only would improve the developmental preparation of young children, but it also would help stabilize parental employment, enhance the viability of neighborhood enterprises, and promote safer, better-connected communities.

The guides in the last category address techniques for advancing neighborhood-based family strengthening work, such as how to develop a communications strategy and how to use data and maintain accountability for specific outcomes.

Additional guides may be developed as new requests for assistance surface from the sites. We view these guides not as an end in themselves, but as a first step in posing and answering some of the most difficult questions we face about how to help families in the toughest neighborhoods. Toward this end, we welcome readers' comments and thoughts on any of the subjects included in these guides.

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executive summary

Effective family-strengthening efforts will require more than statements of support and photo opportunities. They will require commitment and active participation that literally shout, loudly and clearly to the public at large, that reconnecting our most fragile families is the most important thing we can possibly do if we want to improve the life prospects of our nation's children.—Doug Nelson, KIDS COUNT Data Book, 2000

The *Making Connections* agenda—building strong families and strong neighborhoods in 22 cities—is ambitious. As noted above, commitment and participation are essential ingredients for success. But it takes hard work, and an explicit communication policy, to get the kind of support and involvement that can make a difference. After all, shouting is most effective when it is part of an overall communication plan, a blueprint for action. Such a blueprint, a strategic communication plan, can guide the Foundation, its grantees, and the teams in each city in determining what they talk about, to whom they talk, and how they do the talking.

Communication is not an end in itself. It is a means to action, part of the interlocking components of social change. *Making Connections* sites are at different stages in their thinking about communication, and the messages and activities they develop will differ from city to city. But wherever they are in their planning, it is never too early to think of how they want to build the conversation.

This guide defines the principles and components of effective communication and shows how communicating can be a critical element of success. The guide presents an array of options for communicating and a framework for thinking strategically about choices. Sites will not be able to do everything in this guide (nor would they want to). But the discussion is designed to build their awareness of the possibilities and to help them choose those that are most relevant and hopeful for their particular circumstances.

This guide defines communication broadly. It argues that residents who are working to make their lives better are the heart of a communication strategy. It addresses a wide array of ways to communicate with residents and other community leaders. A media plan may be one component of a communication strategy, but this guide offers options that go beyond the basic tenets of a traditional media plan.

The **Introduction** discusses the ingredients of a comprehensive communication strategy and presents a framework—a Strategic Communication Wheel—to make it happen. A communication strategy in the foundation and nonprofit world is often an add-on, something that appears on the radar screen once results are ready to be disseminated. It is the premise of this guide that communicating is integral to the *Making Connections* effort from the beginning. In addition, this guide will make the case that to be successful, communication activities and products must be diverse, involve multiple players and audiences, and build consensus through discussion and debate.

Potential Requests, Opportunities, and Challenges links communication to the substantive work that is taking place in the sites. Questions address which messages to convey, budgets, staff capacity, and the time needed to communicate effectively. This section discusses the changing role of the media, the importance of listening and involving audiences in a conversation, and the promise of technology. In addition to identifying the challenges to leadership, hype, and turf battles that sites might face, there is a section on the importance of evaluating communication.

ways and means of communicating: "branding," walking tours of the neighborhoods, arts festivals, tote bags,

Promising Approaches looks at a number of examples with lessons for *Making Connections* sites:

A. Louisville, Kentucky—A Comprehensive Community-Based Communication Strategy

B. Medina, Ohio—Public Engagement and the Power of Listening

C. Yakima, Washington—Using Community Radio to Involve Parents in Education

D. Legacy—Television as a Catalyst for Conversation

E. Public Education and Policy Change—Handgun Violence Against Youth in California

F. Highbridge Horizon—The Power of a Community Newspaper

G. New Orleans, Manchester, Venice—Integrating the Arts into Communication

The **Resources** section is divided into selected publications and selected organizations and their websites.

introduction

A. WHAT IS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND WHY SHOULD MAKING CONNECTIONS SITES NEED IT?

Communication takes place wherever and whenever people come together to discuss issues. *Webster's Dictionary* defines it as "an exchange of information." Communication deals with what people choose to say or not to say, how they listen, and what they hear. Through communication, communities can promote positive or negative messages about their children, their neighborhoods, and their future.

What do we mean by "strategic communication"? Many think of it as management of information or messages, with a focus mainly on the media as the vehicles that shape public opinion. Others look to engage community leaders and residents in conversations that not only help *communicate* the reform, but also build involvement in the substance of the initiative. Some do both.

> *The art of communication is the language of leadership.*
> —James Humes

Probably the simplest definition of strategic communication, and the one most helpful for the *Making Connections* initiative, is the use of a variety of tools or methods to create and sustain a conversation about specific goals; in this case, how to help communities support families who thrive. Strategic communication in this sense is more than message management. It is more than a series of discrete products or activities. It is how all of these elements are put together to achieve each site's goals. Communication can help heighten awareness of the strengths in families and neighborhoods, increase general hopefulness that these neighborhoods can be good places to raise children, and place shared responsibility for making that happen with a wide range of community partners.

Strategic communication doesn't happen by chance or simply because it's a good idea. Rather it is a planned process with participation from local leaders, communication specialists, and residents. This process will determine what the local leaders need to know and say, whom to include as partners in the conversation, and how to frame the dialogue. That's the *what* of strategic communication.

The *how* of strategic communication involves a range of options big and small, both high-tech and no-tech, that far exceeds anything we dreamed of five or 10 years ago. Choices range from the Internet to a community newspaper, from an ethnic radio station to a neighborhood summit. But the underlying communication principle remains the same: *Each* and *all* of the choices should reflect and support the sites' goals.

A strategic communication plan is practical and comprehensive. It includes a mélange of different components, many of them being used concurrently. It influences how the Foundation communicates with its grantees, how grantees communicate with one another, how community organizations communicate with neighborhood families, and how they all participate in a common agenda.

With so many parts and so many people, communicating must take place on various levels throughout the initiative. It is too late to wait until the end of an initiative, when results are ready to be reported, or to jump into a crisis communication mode in the event of bad news. Communication means thinking about how to convey and share information among partners from the beginning of an initiative.

When a communication strategy is well planned and integrated into an initiative, it increases the chances of success. Excitement about change grows and is spontaneously shared. People are motivated by the stories they hear. *Everyone* involved becomes

ways and means of communicating: testimony at public hearings, websites, press releases, public engagement,

WHEN to use a COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

A strategic communication plan will help sites in a range of endeavors.

- Sites concerned about school reform will want to engage parents in improving their children's education: How parents are recruited, what materials are used, and how schools are transformed into family-friendly places all require a communication strategy.
- Sites that focus on health care will want to reach families who are eligible for publicly funded programs but don't know it: Identifying these families and implementing an effective outreach plan is a communication task.
- Improving the quality of child care means increasing consumer awareness and demand for higher standards: Helping parents respond effectively is part of a communication strategy.
- As neighborhood residents grapple with community safety and justice issues, they will face a lot of myths about the criminal justice system and offenders or ex-offenders who live in the community: A communication strategy can replace myths with facts.
- Public opinion polls show that the American public has a negative view of children, particularly teens, and of vulnerable families in general: Changing this punitive public perception requires a sophisticated communication strategy.

a communicator. The school secretary is as important a team player in enlisting parents' support for school reform as is the principal or superintendent. With a well-planned communication strategy, sites will raise the level of civic dialogue about complicated issues. As a result, they may develop more creative solutions and spread the word to other communities.

Communication in the *Making Connections* initiative involves five sets of key players:

- **Local leaders and residents** who are setting the neighborhood's agenda are most critical to the development of the site's communication plan. The importance of having key local people involved in shaping what and how information is conveyed cannot be overstated.
- **Local learning partners** are organizations designated in each site to serve as educational partners, helping each neighborhood group define and execute its agenda. Since one of the local learning partners' goals is to help build ongoing capacity in the neighborhood sites, they will have a key role in helping develop communication skills among various neighborhood groups.
- **Site teams** from the Annie E. Casey Foundation are also instrumental in helping sites develop and implement effective communication strategies. This includes the site team leader, the Technical Assistance/Resource Center (TARC) liaison, the communication liaison from external affairs, as well as the diarists who are documenting the unfolding of the *Making Connections* agenda in each site.
- **Communication consultants** have been retained in many sites to help the local group develop its communication strategies. This often includes the development of a media plan and the provision of a range of training opportunities.

+ **Website design firms** are employed in some sites to help local leaders develop a website as one part of their communication strategy.

Each of these five groups of people is involved in helping to define, shape, execute, and monitor the sites' communication strategies. This large array of people poses a special challenge: Communicating with each other demands a concerted effort even before tackling the task of communicating with the broader community.

B. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION WHEEL

Communicating is a learned skill. Few of us are "born communicators," but most can learn to be good at it. Learning begins with planning. As the writer Alice Walker says, "Leaving things to chance may be exciting, but it's hard to do sustained work in a perpetual state of surprise."

This suggests that *Making Connections* sites need to think carefully about how they want to communicate information and to which audiences. To do this, sites may want to use a six-part Strategic Communication Wheel that identifies the critical components of a communication strategy. There is a sequence to the parts, but the process is circular, because the need to communicate never ends. Activities change as program goals and objectives change and as we learn what works.

1. There are numerous ways to communicate and spread ideas. The media are often a default communication strategy, because, like Mt. Everest, they are always there. The media play an important role, to be sure, in framing public policy choices and reaching policymakers. But communication is likely to be a diverse and comprehensive process in the *Making Connections* sites, and options will change according to the specific issues and needs of each community. Flyers, posters, door hangers, and street banners can broadcast messages and recruit participants to events.

REASONS
to communicate

+ to get attention
+ to create a buzz
+ to inform
+ to inspire
+ to build trust
+ to organize
+ to connect
+ to change public perception
+ to build a movement
+ to counter apathy or opposition
+ to change policy
+ to disseminate information
+ to build bridges
+ to sustain reform
+ to uncover neighborhood strengths
+ to increase visibility of community leaders

Town forums, picnics, living room conversations, and faith-based meetings can all engage residents and community leaders in public dialogue. The Internet and community newspapers can link the leaders and help team players stay on the same page as they receive and disseminate information.

The two words "information" and "communication" are often used interchangeably, but they signify much different things. Information is like giving out; communication is getting through.—Sidney J. Harris

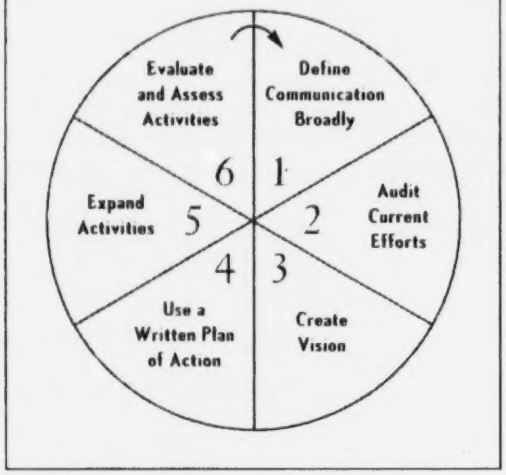
2. There is an audit of current communication efforts. It is helpful to start by assessing a community's current capacity and materials. What is already being communicated about the initiative?

ways and means of communicating: videos, book clubs, conferences, "buzz," door-to-door surveys, flyers,

Who is doing it? Is it effective? How is it determined? Are the right people reached? What materials and back-up support exist (websites, videos, brochures, TV ads, speeches, etc.)? Are they up to date? Accessible? Visually interesting? Are the messages on target? Do they tell stories? Are there any other communication campaigns going on in the community? What resources do you have for communication? What is the capacity of the community to support communication—are there local printers, designers, writers?

3. **A communication vision is created**. This is the section that turns the wheel, because it ties communication activities and products to the goals of the initiative. More often than communication professionals would like to admit, organizations spend a great deal of money on communication projects that are tangential to the work at hand. In such cases, even the most creative and innovative activities don't add much value. In order to link communication to the important work that needs to be done in each *Making Connections* city, community leaders may want to consider the following questions:

strategic
COMMUNICATION wheel



- **What are the substantive goals of the reform?** A communication plan is strategic when it flows directly from the site goals. What do you want to communicate? Which issue (or issues) will be the focus in each site? What reforms, objectives, and outcomes are identified for achievement in two years? Five years?

- **Who needs to be engaged to achieve the above substantive goals?** What groups of people or "audiences" need to be part of the initiative if it is to succeed? Who can spread the word and involve others?

- **What actions do these "target audiences" need to take that are different from what they are currently doing?** Do you need volunteers? Do you want legislators to advocate for policy change? Do you need to build general awareness and informed support?

- **What messages will motivate the target audiences to get involved and join an effort to find solutions?** How do you translate concepts as general as neighborhood and family strengthening into specific, compelling messages? What will get attention? Why should people join you in this endeavor? What's in it for them if the reform works? What are the natural interests of your audience groups, and how can your messages connect to those interests? Neighborhood conversations and surveys can help you learn how citizens and local leaders view the issues at the beginning of an initiative and where they get information about their community (i.e., the local newspaper or the local beauty parlor). Message development in this kind of an initiative is rarely a one-way street that simply "delivers" the ideas you want people to accept. Different messages will reach and involve different audiences. How do you structure a dialogue that tries to reach consensus? *(See Message Development, page 14.)*

Internet, intranet, extranet, e-mentoring, oral histories, posters, refrigerator magnets, op-ed essays, sermons

- **What communication activities and products will help reach and involve each of the target audiences?** Different groups can be reached in different ways. An op-ed, for example, can influence the president of the city council, but it might not motivate a stressed mother who needs to reach out for help. What is the best way to involve people in a conversation about community safety, child welfare, or public schools? How can the new technology help you reach specific groups of people? Educating adolescents about birth control, for example, may be most effectively done on the web or with catchy radio announcements.

4. **A written communication plan of action** will help sites pull it all together. It's important that organizational leadership participates in and supports the goals and activities in the plan. Whenever possible, develop activities that can be measured, such as personal contact with each household in a given neighborhood through door-to-door canvassing and distribution of brochures about programs that support families. Estimate the resources needed to do the job and identify funding sources. Form a communication working team and divide the assignments. Build a permanent chain of activities. Focus them—busy people don't have a lot of time for extraneous information. Prioritize. Budget. Set deadlines. Make sure someone is responsible for each activity. Begin to create supportive materials—even a community picnic needs more than food on the picnic table. Field test the materials with your audiences; design the materials with pizzazz. You do not have to do everything at once. Focus on a few audiences at a time. Go slowly so you can learn along the way. Prepare a crisis

PRINCIPLES of successful COMMUNICATION

- Communication follows substance, which means the leadership must be at the communication table from the beginning. Communication activities do not stand alone, and they are not add-ons.
- A communication strategy has many different activities and products, but they are all connected under the umbrella of the site's reform goals.
- Effective communication is both proactive and reactive, planned and opportunistic.
- Effective communication efforts are grounded in the culture and practice of the community.
- Multiple players are involved and there is a clear understanding that, in some way, everyone is a communicator.
- Spokespeople are trusted by the community and always include members of the community.
- Communication staff, consultants, and spokespeople are partners to the substantive work at the sites, know the issues, understand city rules, regulations, and bureaucracy, and know the community.
- Communication is funded enough to do the job, but need not be lavish.
- A communication strategy is evaluated and tracked to show what works; results are shared from site to site.

ways and means of communicating: talking, block parties, conferences, open-mike poetry slams (poetry readings),

TAKING ADVANTAGE of unforseen OPPORTUNITIES

Camden, New Jersey, a *Making Connections* city, has faced a series of challenges in recent years, including the threat of state intervention due to charges of city fiscal mismanagement. Camden and all other New Jersey municipalities are required by state law to produce a master plan that looks at land use and physical improvement goals over the next 20 years. Although Camden reached out to involve citizens in their plan, there was little initial response. So the *Making Connections* team moved into the gap. Working with communication and urban planning experts, they produced a clear, well-designed summary of the plan—written without the official jargon of the original. They printed large quantities in both English and Spanish. This effort launched a series of meetings for Camden residents to react to the plan. The city planning staff incorporated citizen comments into the next draft that will be presented to the planning commission and the city council for ratification in 2001. The quick response in Camden shows that a good communication strategy takes advantage of opportunities to communicate whenever they come along.

communication plan so you will know what to do in the event of an unforeseen emergency.

5. At the full implementation stage, sites can expand their communication activities to reach more groups on their list of target audiences. Full implementation will likely take several years. During this stage, they may want to train a cadre of spokespeople who will be able to speak at meetings, facilitate discussions, talk to the press and to opinion leaders and city officials. Spokespeople can learn to ask questions and listen to the answers. It is useful to create boilerplate talking points, speeches, and flyers that can be customized for individual speakers and neighborhoods. An attractive, user-friendly website is an asset; and sites can create traffic by promoting the website in all of their materials. Sharing communication ideas with other *Making Connections* sites will be important, and there may even be opportunities to collaborate on communication ideas with other cities.

6. It is important to evaluate and assess a site's communication activities to learn what's working (and what's not). This is the most elusive step in the process. Because all communication activities should be tied directly to the substantive goals of each *Making Connections* site *(See Step 3 of the Strategic Communication Wheel, page 11.)*, success of the communication agenda is tied to the success of the overall initiative. But we also want to focus in on specific communication components. Often, evaluators in the communication field simply count the number of publications distributed or the positive references in the media. This gives a sense of activity or process, but it does not show who got the information or how they responded to it. To test *this* goal, you need clear objectives from the beginning, as well as baseline and follow-up surveys. *(See page 27 for a more detailed discussion of evaluation.)*

Finally we return to the first point on the wheel. And we revisit the fact that communication is a diverse process and that almost everyone involved in this initiative is a communicator. We look at new ideas and opportunities and funding issues. We reassess our audiences and messages. And we start all over again, but from a new place.

press briefings, brochures, fortune cookies with targeted messages, tree plantings, asking, listening, speakers

potential requests, opportunities, and challenges

A. WHAT ISSUES MIGHT NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS AND LEADERS RAISE ABOUT COMMUNICATION?

The definition of strategic communication in the Introduction calls for an expansive approach to communication. But when we get concrete about implementation of such a broad strategy, all sorts of questions arise.

Message Development

What is the right language for an initiative that has as its goals the somewhat nebulous concepts of neighborhood transformation and family strengthening?

> *Through listening to stories, we are joined with the teller in a remarkable dance that opens us up to new places, people, and ideas.*—Richard Stone

Messages are the most important parts of a communication strategy—and often the most difficult. The bottom line message of the *Making Connections* initiative is, in fact, quite straightforward: *Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods.* Yet how do you define neighborhood transformation and family strengthening simply and clearly but with specifics and enough detail to illustrate the complexity of the issues? Many people believe they understand the concept, but when asked to define "strengthening families," it's easy to fall into academic jargon, mushy language, or some version of "I'm not sure how to explain it, but I know it when I see it."

The Indianapolis site team hopes to answer this question with a video that includes vignettes about "families that work." Another idea is a "man (or woman)-in-the-street" video that shows interviews asking people in the community to define *strong family* and *strong neighborhood.* The interviews would probably yield definitions ranging from the sublime (family members support one another) to the practical (strong neighborhoods have banks and supermarkets and safe, affordable housing) to the humorous (families who work out together . . .). A finished video will likely reflect the flavor of the neighborhood. And, from such a range of viewpoints, it is possible that what will emerge is the articulation that strong neighborhoods are connected to strong families—and vice versa.

Some messages need to start with the problem. But how do we talk about poverty, isolated families, and distressed neighborhoods without overwhelming journalists, policymakers, and local residents who have no doubt seen their share of initiatives come and go over time? Even the most shocking statistics can seem faceless and numbing over time. Yet there are ways to frame the discussion with more hope than despair. Consider the following excerpt from a speech by Doug Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, about the enormous problems Baltimore faces as a *Making Connections* site:

> *Central Baltimore City is home to about one tenth of our state's kids. But those 10 percent account for over 40 percent of all the Maryland children growing up in poverty. Those 10 percent account for over a third of the state's abused and neglected caseload; over a third of the juvenile violent arrests, and a very big share of the state's high school dropout rate. Put simply, if we concentrated on making a difference in the lives of families raising kids within five minutes of this room, we could have an enormous impact on the statewide statistics on the well-being of Maryland's children.*

A seemingly overwhelming problem, when focused like this, seems much more manageable. No doubt, each of the 22 *Making Connections* sites has a similar story.

ways and means of communicating: training, coffee klatches, press conferences, focus groups, games, local

tips for FRAMING

EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

- Effective messages are clear, consistent, and free of jargon.
- Effective messages include stories about people and issues. Spokespeople are good storytellers who bring in the policy implications and community context of every personal story.
- Effective messages are realistic and truthful. Spokespeople don't promise more than they can deliver, and they are prepared to talk about what doesn't work as well as what does—and the lessons learned from both.
- In preparing effective messages, communicators identify target audiences and survey them early on to get their understanding of the issues. Listening is as important a skill as lecturing.
- Effective messages are specific and local. Different messages will be needed for different audiences.
- Effective messages are spread through materials that are varied and visually interesting. Core messages are repeated over and over again.
- Effective messages start with a noncontroversial head-nodder with which everyone can agree, and then move to the more controversial elements.
- Effective messages include logos, web addresses, and phone numbers on every product, even things like refrigerator magnets.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

How can we keep the message alive over time? Rich detail and a variety of different ways to deliver the same messages will keep the sites' initiatives on the radar screen. So will an increasing number of people who are involved in the work itself at the local level. Telling the story with enough detail to make it come alive to numerous audiences will be important. Spokespeople need to come from the community, from families who have personal experiences to tell, and from city, state, and local organizations. A good strategic communication plan will build in a progression of activities, and community leaders and residents will likely phase in and out of a working communication team.

Storytelling is the oldest form of sharing information and knowledge. It happens naturally at the family dinner table or at the coffee machine in the office. The challenge for the *Making Connections* sites is to capture the life and action of the changes taking place among families and in the community. This is also where opportunistic communication comes in. As the substantive reform develops a life of its own and begins to intersect with the political life of the city and the state, local partners will find opportunities to communicate at every bend in the road. This means implementing what is planned, but also being flexible enough to take advantage of these new communication possibilities as they arise.

Culturally appropriate messages. In most of the *Making Connections* sites, good message development also means making sure materials and meetings and communication activities in general are inclusive of the variety of language groups and cultural orientations that make up the community. (Not everything

suggested TALKING POINTS

Each site will develop messages that are specific to its families and neighborhoods. There are, however, some general talking points that are relevant across the country. The following thoughts on messages were developed by communication consultant Karen Stevenson in conjunction with staff members at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

PROBLEM. Over the past decade, circumstances have improved for a large number of children, which makes it even more dramatic that conditions have gotten worse for other kids. The combination of vulnerable families and concentrated poverty sharply reduces the prospects for these children.

- Today, three to five million of the nation's kids are likely to be left out and left behind.
- These children and their families are clustered in high-poverty neighborhoods that are disconnected from opportunities to learn, work, and grow.
- Many of these families succeed through superhuman effort by tapping into their neighborhood's resources and organizations that are sources of strength and resiliency.
- However, too many families are overwhelmed by the challenges that come with concentrated poverty, isolation, and a deterioration of social conditions.

BELIEF. We believe families in these neighborhoods can reconnect with their dreams. In order for this to occur, we will need to foster profound change in many directions: policy, practice, behavior, values, and cultural reinforcement.

MESSAGE. "Kids do well when families do well, and families do well in neighborhoods that support them."

THE INITIATIVE. *Making Connections* supports locally driven campaigns in 22 cities to build public support for, and action around, activities that help parents do their job. The initiative builds on new and existing policies and programs that strengthen the connection of families to

- Economic opportunity—Good jobs will increase families' financial options, such as building savings and establishing credit.
- Networks—Families need strong social networks like churches, civic groups, cultural institutions, and various community organizations that can provide support.
- Formal and informal help—High-quality, accessible, and culturally competent services in schools, law enforcement, early childhood programs, and health care will help parents meet their children's needs.

THE BIG TENT. *Making Connections* is part of a larger initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation called Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development. NTFD will embrace a wide range of efforts and activities designed to change policy as well as practice. For information, go to *www.aecf.org/initiatives/ntfd/index.htm.*

ways and means of communicating: holiday celebrations, community sing-a-longs, yard signs, bumper stickers,

needs to be multilingual; a website to deliver information to CEOs of ethnic community organizations will probably be acceptable in English. But if the content is designed to reach out to families, it needs to be translated.) For this task, it is important to recognize that simple translation from English is not sufficient. Materials must be written and presented in various languages from the beginning to avoid the not-so-subtle pitfalls of cultural nuance. To cite just one example, the literal translation of "second-hand smoke" in Spanish is "smoke from the second hand."

Is a Comprehensive Communication Strategy Expensive?

Communication activities need to be funded adequately from the beginning in order to do the job. But it need not always be expensive to communicate effectively. Some elements are costly—paid television advertisements in an urban media market, for example, or glossy publications in four colors, or buying new computers for a community center. But computers can be donated, and ads can be run on radio rather than television. (It's easier to target specific audiences on radio anyway.)

Materials should be visually attractive and well presented, but they don't have to be fancy productions. Street banners can be painted by neighborhood children as part of an art project. Music, art, and journalism students from local schools can offer hands (and voices) to community projects. (And when kids are involved, their parents are reached.) Teens can be trained to do door-to-door canvassing. Residents can do local video interviews that can be aired as mini-documentaries at community events. Neighborhood businesses can sometimes do printing jobs at cost or help with databases. Volunteers are not the sole answer, but one can do a lot with ingenuity and foot power.

Who Implements a Comprehensive Communication Plan?

Such a plethora of communication activities and products is, of course, labor intensive. But it need not all be done by one person; it fact, it's a sure case for failure and burnout if one person tries to do it all. Recruitment of a communication team and involvement of parents and youth in developing products and staging events have a multiplying effect: Engaging them at the same time they are building their capacity to communicate is a good idea. And when Foundation funding ends, people with communication skills remain to continue their good work in the community.

There is more than a verbal tie between the words "common," "community," and "communication."—John Dewey

Who's the best storyteller in the neighborhood? Even if this person has little experience making speeches, he or she may be a good candidate to learn. Some of the best overall communication efforts pull together people interested in public relations, photography, graphic design, and match them with skilled professionals for workshops or apprenticeships. This capacity building in action leads to increased commitment and enthusiasm among both mentors and students.

It is possible (if not probable) that some sites may want their technical assistance provider to do the communication work himself or herself. After all, isn't that why they have been hired? In the *Making Connections* initiative, however, it is important to encourage community leaders and residents to learn and practice communication skills, and more specifically to develop and articulate their own messages. There are technical aspects of communication that advisors might want to take over—for example, databases, placement of public service announcements, identification of electronic options for outreach—but the messages must be owned locally, and this is more likely to happen if they are generated locally.

FRAMING MESSAGES about YOUTH

The FrameWorks Institute, a nonprofit think tank in Washington, D.C., has sponsored in-depth studies on media and message development. The organization recently issued a report that looks at ways to counter the negative perceptions of youth, "Reframing Youth Issues for Public Consideration and Support: A FrameWorks Message Memo."

Media—both news and entertainment—are skewed toward a negative opinion of young people. Stories highlight teen violence, teen mothers, students and drugs. The problem is even more severe when it comes to the portrayal of youth of color.

The Berkeley Media Studies Group, a media literacy and advocacy organization, recently followed three California newspapers for a year and found that education and violence dominated the coverage of youth. The study found that half of all stories of youth focused on a problem; far fewer discussed solutions. This approach, the study said, "reinforces the notion that violence is inevitable." Yet the truth is that only three in 100 young people perpetrate or are victims of serious violence in a given year.

FrameWorks made a number of suggestions about framing messages around youth:

- **Don't use the word "teenager,"** which has powerful, negative associations. Rather use "youth" or "adolescent." Better yet, talk about "adolescence," which is understood as a process or a stage that everyone goes through.
- **Show youth as volunteers, involved in sports and other extracurricular activities, like the performing arts.**
- **Explain youth activities in terms that include the values of work**: responsibility, teamwork, commitment, self-restraint, goal-orientation, leadership skills. Emphasize that youth are learning and searching for ways to contribute to their communities and to find their place in life.
- **Use coaches and volunteer leaders to attest to the values and hard work of today's youth**. These leaders see hundreds of young people regularly and can speak with authority about their attributes.
- **Avoid the "hero youth" model that lifts up an individual as exceptional and casts doubt on the less accomplished majority**. This is particularly meaningful advice for communities of color where research shows that the personal exceptions often reinforce the idea that the rest of the group just needs to try harder. Instead of highlighting the young person who organized a park clean-up, for example, focus on the group of kids who did the work.
- **Show youth in situations in which their work is altruistic and helps solve social problems**. The public is hungry for solutions. But rather than suggesting that youth should solve all of their own problems, look to messages that show young people working together with adults and even young children on issues that affect all of them.

(For the full text of this report, see the Benton Foundation's Connect for Kids website: *www.connectforkids.org/usr_doc/reframingyth.html.)*

ways and means of communicating: editorial board meetings, information packets, speakers' bureaus, awards

The Denver *Making Connections* site recruited a group of volunteers from the community for a communication team. Most did not have specific communication skills at the outset, but they were eager to learn. A local communication firm trained them to write press releases and talk to the media. The communication team in Denver also partners with that site's community-organizing team. By attending each other's meetings, the communicators learn when flyers or door hangers would be useful tools for the organizers and volunteer to produce them.

It's important that the local communication people work hand in hand with the community leaders and not operate independently. One way to keep everyone on the same page is for someone on the communication team to go to major site meetings and for community leaders to go to communication sessions.

How Long Does a Communication Strategy Take?

As the Queen told Alice, "You start at the beginning and you go until you get to the end." This is a common question but a misleading one, because there is, in fact, no answer to it. The kind of communication effort we're talking about takes as long as the overall initiative does. Communication planning starts at the very beginning of the initiative. Communication is tied to site goals throughout the initiative. No site will be able to do everything at once. But they will learn as they go, and keep the communication wheel turning as long as the work continues. In the end, the skills that residents and community leaders develop will go on far beyond the *Making Connections* initiative.

B. WHAT ARE THE TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES ON WHICH SITES CAN BUILD?

Communication strategies are becoming more and more sophisticated all the time. There are several trends and opportunities within the field that may be helpful to the *Making Connections* sites.

The Media and Strategic Communication

The media form a key communication component and a constant opportunity. Mainstream print and broadcast outlets are important vehicles for reaching influential opinion makers, advocating for policy reform, and affecting public attitudes and choices. Making Connections site leaders will benefit from developing ongoing relationships with reporters to help spread their messages and convey important information. A growing roster of sophisticated beat reporters who focus on children's and family issues will help local sites achieve such coverage. Media strategies will work better if sites train a small cadre of spokespeople—both community leaders and families—to reach out and talk to these journalists.

> *The media are the communication networks of our culture. Marshall McLuhan likened the media to a world-wide electronic nervous system, extending our own senses to events all over the planet, creating a global village. The media have enormous power to set society's political and social agendas. Through the media we form many of our beliefs, opinions, prejudices and concerns.*
> —Jason Salzman and Paul Klite

Sites will likely develop a separate media plan as part of their overall communication strategy, making decisions about how much time and emphasis to place on getting media coverage. A media plan is only one component of a broader communication strategy, but it is such an important one that *Making Connections* site teams will want to pay attention.

Using the media is the most visible component of a communication strategy and the easiest to understand (although not the easiest to implement). But the mainstream media are not always the best way to tell the story of a neighborhood or to reach and engage the residents and families who live there. Residents are as likely to learn about the news in their community, good and bad, from their preacher or a community weekly newspaper, as they are from the daily newspaper.

ceremonies, media literacy, street fairs, materials in different languages, National Public Radio sponsorships

tips for

GAINING media ATTENTION

Making Connections sites can take several steps to get media coverage on family strengthening activities.

- Create a media plan and message.
- Prepare a media list and keep it current.
- Become a master interviewee.
- Stage an event.
- Submit a letter to the editor.
- Arrange an editorial board meeting.
- Write a guest opinion (op-ed).
- Put out a news release and follow up.
- Respond to stories in the news.
- Contact journalists in advance.
- Use community calendars and public service announcements.
- Use talk radio.
- Hold a news conference when you have specific news to announce.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

In addition, despite some positive trends toward covering stories in context and including "good news," mainstream media are still better at documenting bad news than they are at presenting discussions of complex problems and solutions. This can come in handy for *Making Connections* sites if, for example, they want to expose something that is *not* working or needs to be changed. When Oregon legislation forced Medicaid families into managed health care, for example, and families were unable to find a primary caregiver in the city of Salem, a survey was released to the press showing that the state was not meeting its contractual requirements. Once the story was covered in the media, health providers developed a plan for a new clinic. Getting the new clinic in the paper, however, and tracking its services to residents as part of a larger community plan of action, is a much more difficult task for communicators.

Comprehensive reforms that deal with long-term change are quite difficult to get covered in depth in the media—unless they give rise to controversy or rancor. Reporters look for concrete results, and they are often impatient and under pressure from editors to file short, snappy, focused stories.

Because of these limitations, it is important that *Making Connections* site leaders take a proactive stance and frame their own messages, using the media selectively. Often the best way to get substantive media coverage is for community leaders to advance an idea themselves. Letters to the editor, op-ed essays, talk shows on local radio or TV, and writing for community newspapers are good ways to stay in control of the message. Columnists, in contrast to reporters, often have more time to delve into the complexities of real issues.

The bottom line, when it comes to media, is the same one that governs all communication choices. When will coverage in the media directly contribute to the success of a site's goals and objectives? What types of media will be most helpful? What resources will it take to implement a media strategy, and is the community team prepared to work with reporters? Finally, how does the media component of the communication strategy complement the other components?

ways and means of communicating. television talk shows. radio talk shows. billboard ads, special events, mime,

Community and Ethnic Media

A promising new media trend is the growing reach and power of community and ethnic media. Local weeklies or biweeklies often cover neighborhoods better than the citywide press, either broadcast or print. Radio is also local and frequently even more targeted to specific populations. Cable access television can reach specific audiences and is a good training ground for mainstream TV.

Urban ethnic communities usually have their own newspapers and favorite radio or TV stations

MAJOR media OUTLETS

Media fall into the following categories:

PRINT MEDIA (Your contacts: reporters and editors). Most cities have only one, or at most two, local daily newspapers. Most urban areas also have a wealth of specialty papers, daily, weekly, or monthly. You can pitch a story, write letters to the editor or op-ed essays, or become a resource for reporters.

TELEVISION MEDIA (Your contacts: assignment editors and reporters). Most cities have at least three or four local stations that cover the news. Cable television adds even more choices.

RADIO (Your contacts: news directors and reporters). Radio is booming. Most commercial radio stations specialize in one narrow type of programming, though few broadcast a lot of local news. Talk radio offers opportunities to raise issues, both as a caller or as a guest; but it can sometimes be contentious. Public and community radio are generally noncommercial outlets and have a range of public affairs programming.

NEWS SERVICES (Your contacts: "daybook" editors and reporters). All media outlets subscribe to news services to get a steady supply of news. The Associated Press is the largest news service in the country and is divided into city bureaus. If AP covers your story, it may be picked up in multiple outlets. Smaller news services include Reuters, United Press International, Gannett, Bloomberg, and Pacific News Service.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA (Your contacts: community-access television). Accessing alternative media can provide sites with opportunities such as place-based video projects and diaries, and community-access television stations where residents can discuss local issues. Video documentaries and diaries are typically neighborhood based. Public and cable community-access television often designate public space for local input.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA (Your contacts: yourself and a web designer). On-line networks are increasingly used to communicate information in an interactive format. Chat rooms, community websites, on-line parent support groups, electronic neighborhood forums, e-mail, and listservs are examples of electronic media that can be used to convey important messages.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

and programs. In New York City and several cities in California, the audiences for Spanish television news programs have topped those of the network affiliates in the ratings. These outlets are hungry for good stories. Ethnic media are also more focused on community issues and even private life, an excellent starting point for the *Making Connections* initiative. Ethnic media often transcend specific neighborhood boundaries, reaching people all across the city who speak Chinese, Spanish, or Khmer, for example.

Some *Making Connections* sites have already published or have plans to produce their own newsletters or newspapers. This is another way of leveraging goals through communication, because local residents can be trained to write, produce, design, and sell ads for the paper. Local publications will have a stronger impact if residents keep the dialogue about community issues alive and ongoing. In addition, information can be put on a website, thus adding to the opportunities of the "new" media and the Internet. *(See page 40 for a description of one community's newspaper.)*

Listening and Public Engagement

Particularly when an initiative takes place at the community level, there are multiple opportunities to think broadly about the process and practice of communicating. One of the more interesting trends in the field is a strategy called "public engagement," an admittedly fuzzy piece of communication jargon that refers to a process of listening, mobilizing deliberation, building trust, and reaching consensus around social change.

In the *Making Connections* sites, public engagement is an opportunity to reach community residents and isolated families and help them understand, shape, and benefit from the initiative. Public engagement can increase buy-in, keep the issues on the table over time, and help residents achieve their goals.

Public engagement employs some traditional communication tools—audience identification and message development, brochures, and flyers. But what makes public engagement different is that these tools are used to promote discourse, even debate. Public engagement stresses large and small face-to-face meetings or forums where "communication as conversation" takes place. It is particularly useful for building ownership among local partners—teachers, social service providers, or youth development workers.

With a public engagement strategy, communicating becomes *everyone's* responsibility, not just the job of a publicist or the leaders of a reform effort. A single parent recently off welfare who struggles to hold down two or three low-paying jobs becomes as much a participant in defining the questions and solutions for her family and her neighborhood as does the head of the local community center. And because she and her neighbors are part of the dialogue, there's a greater chance that the reform will stick.

Doesn't this sound like good, old-fashioned community organizing? Some confuse public engagement with community organizing, and there are, indeed, areas where they intersect. There is a TARC Resource Guide for the *Making Connections* sites called *Residents Engaged in Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods*. That guide shows how to help families help themselves, which is not in itself a communication issue. But just as the work of the sites cannot be accomplished without personal change among struggling families, *reaching* those families and connecting them to opportunities cannot happen without communication. Good communication strategies and tools help the community organizers identify those who need to be included, frame the discussion, shape a reform agenda with residents, and develop and disseminate materials and information along the way.

Techniques such as door-to-door surveys, public service ads on radio and television, and block parties with information booths can get the attention of

families in the community. Flyers, booklets, special events, and hotlines can link isolated parents to support services. Living room conversations can involve residents in an agenda for change. Multicultural and multilingual materials are additional communication tools that are critical in many urban neighborhoods when working with families.

In *Making Connections* sites, community organizers and communicators can work together to enhance each other's strategies. A block party thus becomes more than a barbecue; it is a relaxed opportunity to celebrate clean and safe streets, distribute materials about family services, sign up workers, and build support for new efforts. Study circles (called family circles in some cities) convene small groups of participants for guided discussions of specific topics; the discussions are also an opportunity to offer specific help to individual parents and recruit volunteers. All of these things involve information, education, deliberation, and in-depth discussion.

Public engagement, when successful, results in an ongoing dialogue about complicated issues; it gives participants important information and allows them to air their worries and misconceptions. It helps keep the agenda alive over time by dealing honestly with obstacles—raising them for consideration. In the end, it is more likely to lead to informed consensus, which means the reforms have a better chance of being sustained. It is an ideal approach for this current age of skepticism, where the public and community leaders have seen a fair share of reforms fail and often mistrust government leaders and foundations as well as the media.

Public engagement also has risks. Because the discussion is two-way, the site leadership has less control of the message. Opponents could find a seat at the table as well. As the local teams become more public, they also become more accountable and open to scrutiny. Journalists will seek out opposing points of view. That's their job.

But when public engagement works, the messages are more meaningful, the issues are better understood, and the chance for misinterpretation is lessened. In addition, communication skills are built at the local level where they can be sustained. If sites *don't* take the risk and open the conversation up, they may not own the changes that take place, and some cities could be facing one more example of outsiders trying to impose a top-down vision of change.

The Promise of Technology

Internet, extranet, intranet, listservs—what has been called the "Brave New Web" of communication—filter through every section of this guide. Strategic communication must make extensive use of many of the new technologies. But like the other components of a good communication plan, technological aspects also need to be directly linked to the goals of the initiative.

A website can be a critical ingredient of any communication plan. Using the Internet, communities can disseminate information to the media, policymakers, other opinion leaders, academics, and advocates. A website can also provide crucial information and support for the families in the neighborhood—from where to get a vaccine for their children to information on job training programs. A website can be interactive—with families asking questions and giving feedback on material posted on the web, and sharing information with other families in the community and with families in other *Making Connections* cities.

In addition to a website, technology provides other communication tools to help *Making Connections* sites. Listservs, master calendars, e-newsletters, and e-mail are crucial to keeping site team members informed within each city and to sharing information from site to site and from the Foundation to all of the sites.

All *Making Connections* sites are faced with the well-known digital divide. Inner-city families do not

DECIPHERING cyber JARGON

INTERNET. A global network of computers that allows users to send e-mail, view websites, and transfer files from one person to another.

INTRANET. A private network of computers or websites that is accessible only by members of an organization (e.g., employees, staff members).

EXTRANET. Traditionally, a portion of an organization's intranet that is accessible to authorized users from outside the organization (e.g., consultants, customers).

E-ZINE. A periodic magazine or newsletter that is formatted for and sent via e-mail to a list of subscribers. Great for keeping people in touch with an organization and its website.

VISITS OR VISITOR SESSIONS. The number of visitors who access a website over a given time.

LISTSERV. An e-mail server that allows many people with similar interests to engage in ongoing discussions.

DISCUSSION FORUM. A website that allows registered members to post questions, comments, and files that other visitors can view, download, and comment on.

PDF. Adobe's portable document format (pdf) is an industry standard file format that allows any document to be published via the web exactly as it appears in print. The free Adobe reader is needed to view pdf documents. Most sites with pdf's have a link to download the Adobe reader.

yet have universal access to computers and the Internet. The presence of computers is growing fast in schools, however, and students and parents often have access to them there. Public libraries in virtually every city have computers that offer free access to the Internet. Computers with public Internet access can also be placed at community centers, public-housing projects, museums, health centers, even shopping malls. *(See the TARC Resource Guide,* Connecting Families to Computers and On-Line Networks, *available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.)*

No communication strategy in the 21st century is complete without a major digital component, a statement that could not have been made even five years ago. Technology enhances the engagement process in ways that no one has even yet dreamed of. Steve Snow is the former executive director of Charlotte's Web, in Charlotte, North Carolina, a project of Open Studio: The Arts Online, which trains artists and community residents to use the Internet. As Snow puts it: "The potential [of technology] is for everyone to become an information 'sharer,' not just an information consumer. ... Its power to extend education, information, and communication opportunities is unparalleled. It also is not a panacea; it is not a replacement for human ... contact, but a supplement to it. ... It is not a replacement for any social, political or cultural endeavor, but a potential enhancer of each."

THE CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP

Most, if not all, of the *Making Connections* sites will have to conquer another technological frontier—that of content. The Children's Partnership, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to informing the public and leaders about the needs of children, published a groundbreaking report on Internet content. This report, *On-Line Content for Low-Income and Underserved Americans: The Digital Divide's New Frontier*, can help guide *Making Connections* neighborhoods as they decide whether to develop a website and what to put on it.

"There's been so much focus on the boxes and wires to connect to the Internet that we almost forgot to ask what people are getting once they connect," said Wendy Lazarus, co-author of the study and founder of the Children's Partnership. In a survey of 1000 websites, recommended as the best in the field, the partnership found that

- Generalized information is available, but not specific community information, and not at basic literacy levels or in multiple languages.
- Most of the content that is written at limited-literacy levels is designed for the developmental needs of young children.
- Most of the multilingual content that exists is in Spanish, and most of *that* comes from Spain or Latin America, leaving large gaps in content relating to the specific needs of Spanish-speaking families living in the United States.
- Only one percent of the sites surveyed offered information on entry-level job openings or local low-cost housing options.
- General cultural information for African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics is growing, but only one percent of the sites surveyed offered this information at the *local* level.

These findings would seem to open a gaping opportunity for local *Making Connections* teams as they develop their own websites. Teens can be trained in website design and research. Building local websites means polling a range of community residents to determine what information they want and need. This, in itself, is part of a communication strategy that engages a wide range of partners in a site. *(See Resources, page 49, for more information on how to obtain the report.)*

C. WHAT CHALLENGES MIGHT SITES FACE?

Integrating a multipronged communication strategy into each site's initiative is full of promises and challenges. It is much more complicated than a straightforward media or public relations approach, which usually has one or two people in charge who know the field well and can basically do all of the leg work themselves. This initiative needs a beehive of communicators to develop and implement a broad-based communication strategy. These are some of the hurdles:

Diffused Responsibility

If communication is everyone's job, it's easy for it to be no one's responsibility. And since the kind of

using TECHNOLOGY for communication—

SAN ANTONIO

In San Antonio, one of the first efforts by site leaders and local organizations was to collaborate with city officials in building a large database of information about the city, to translate the data into a form that was accessible, and to distribute it widely. The local team hopes to go into even more depth in describing the *Making Connections* geographic area and put that additional information on its own website.

The website will include maps that show available resources by neighborhood, as well as data on specific issues such as crime, teen pregnancy, high school dropout rates, and more. The goal is to provide easily accessible information to local families and to allow them to compare their neighborhood with others across the city. They will learn about problems and solutions in other communities and get ideas and information to use in their own community. The Hispanic Research Center is helping to develop the website and will advise local leaders on indicators to watch over time.

In an innovative example of confronting the digital divide, a local television station in San Antonio is donating at least 20 computers to local families and plans to connect them up to the Internet and train both parents and children. The only caveat is that they watch the local news on that station and send feedback about what they see and think. What an opportunity for them—and for the station.

comprehensive communication we are talking about here rarely appears in anyone's job description, a lot of learning will be going on. The keys are coordination, teamwork, and adequate technical assistance.

Despite the increased time required for coordination of communication activities, the results and the involvement of many players make it worthwhile. More inquiring minds usually lead to more creative ideas, and there will be more hands to do the work. An added bonus is that when people work together on a project, their commitment is raised. So this challenge, when well managed, actually becomes an asset.

The Risk of Overselling

Community organizations and agencies are sometimes accused of spinning a story and overselling reforms. This can happen when communication staff are uninformed or pull ahead of the site leadership. Or it can be the unintended result of genuine enthusiasm about the work and an attempt to make the message simple, clear, and positive.

In a broad initiative like *Making Connections*, it is particularly important to be realistic about how long it takes to make changes. Because the life of this initiative is likely to be many years, neighborhood leaders will need to be prepared to communicate their lessons and their mistakes—as well as their victories—along the way. "Hype" is not likely to be a problem if substantive issues and local challenges are aired from the beginning as site leaders and neighborhood residents set the agenda together.

Turf Battles

With the potential—in fact, with the *goal*—of so many local nonprofits working together, there is

always the possibility of competition. If legitimate disagreements about strategy and tactics—and the ever-present quest for funds—become public, the media will probably cover them. Organizational turf battles are news. A good communication plan should help sites deal with the results of turf conflicts. Particularly if the organizations have agreed on an agenda and a consistent message, there is less likelihood that one or two cantankerous quotes in the newspaper will carry much weight.

If Something Goes Wrong

Public officials often take a "duck and cover" approach to crises—they say as little as possible and hope that the problem (and the media) will go away. This rarely happens.

Planning for a crisis is a critical component of any comprehensive communication strategy. It's important to be prepared in case turf battles among nonprofits hit the news, or a child is harmed, or the Casey Foundation becomes an issue in a local political dispute. There are many excellent guides to crisis communication. *(See the Resources section, particularly the* Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communication for Nonprofits *and the* Grantmakers Communication Manual.)

The common theme of all crisis communication plans is advance preparation. Although it is impossible to predict exactly *what* will happen, it is not difficult to imagine possible scenarios and to strategize how to manage them. A crisis is no reason to panic if you are prepared.

- Know the whole story (i.e., investigate what happened; don't rely on what a reporter says).
- Refrain from saying "No comment." If a spokesperson is unable to answer questions because of confidentiality rules, tell reporters someone will get back to them soon. And do so.
- Define specific roles for staff and spokespeople, so everyone knows what to do.
- Prepare the tone of public comments in advance (and, if possible, prepare sample messages based on potential scenarios).
- Be accurate and honest in what you say.

A test of good communication—and a test of how effectively the overall players at the site work together—will be how well the site survives a crisis. Framing the discussion around such events is crucial to the success, not only of the communication strategy, but also of the initiative itself. A crisis plan that outlines a process and a chain of command is an important part of communication planning. A crisis can sometimes be an opportunity to respond compassionately and productively and to reiterate core messages.

Evaluation: How Do We Know If It Is Working?

Just as outcomes are critical elements of the Making Connections initiative, evaluation—the "E" word—is equally important to understanding communication. But there is little available research on how to effectively assess communication strategies. If communication is done well, for example, it will be an integral part of all aspects of the initiative, thus making it very hard to evaluate it separately. In addition, there are countless variables that have an impact on the success of communication activities—everything from an oil spill that means the press is a no-show at a neighborhood event to a downturn in the economy that leads to lay-offs at the firm that promised pro bono design work.

There are some basic communication benchmarks, however, without which sites cannot move from the starting gate. They all fall under the general questions: Did the site do what it said it would do,

and are the communication activities having the intended effect? More specifically:

- Did the site develop a working communication plan with goals and timetables?
- Has the site recruited a team of communicators to implement the plan?
- Are the messages consistent, interesting, and clear of jargon?
- Are the materials culturally and linguistically appropriate, and are they disseminated creatively to target audiences?
- Are the communication activities varied?
- Is the communication team working with the site leadership team so that each knows what the other is doing?
- Is there a shared vision for the site's goals among the key leaders and spokespeople?
- Is technology being used appropriately and creatively as part of the communication effort? Is there an interactive website? Are visits to the website tracked?
- Has there been an increase in coverage of the site's work in print, broadcast, ethnic, and community media? Does the coverage capture the depth of the initiative?

Benchmarks are important, but they usually measure communication *activities*. They don't tell us much about the actual effectiveness of those activities. It's easy to count how many articles appeared in the local newspaper, but it's harder to know who read the articles and whether the information motivated them to think or act differently.

Assessing effective communication is an inexact science, but it helps when the site's substantive goals are measurable ones. For example, if the site seeks to enroll uninsured children in the federal health insurance program, communication activities can be directed specifically toward reaching eligible families. The number of families who sign up will be at least in part a result of those communication activities. Sites can get an added indication of effectiveness by comparing results with other sites that choose the same goal and use different communication tactics to reach eligible families.

Another question to ask is whether there have been changes in public policies that can be reasonably connected to the communication efforts. This will not be scientific, due to many variables, but connections to success can be drawn. *(See the Promising Approaches example on handgun violence in California, page 37.)*

Other important evaluation tools include neighborhood or citywide surveys and focus groups to assess changes in awareness about key issues or changes in attitudes. It is, of course, important to begin these as early as possible in order to get a baseline from which to make comparisons later. Initial focus groups and surveys also give communicators a sense of what messages and activities work best with which audiences. It is helpful all around if the evaluators assigned to assess the overall initiative also look at communication.

ways and means of communicating: national television news, street and park clean-ups, mayoral proclamations,

promising approaches and resources

Successful communication strategies are labor intensive and need many workers. But communities do have people willing to get involved, to learn new skills, to build their neighborhoods and reach out to vulnerable and isolated families in their midst. Finding these enthusiastic champions and teaching them how to communicate is the key to success. The stories that follow are from initiatives in which people worked together to build innovative communication strategies. None is a perfect example of a perfect communication strategy. But in each, there are useful lessons that can help the communicators in the 22 *Making Connections* sites.

A. LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY—A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY-BASED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Louisville, home of the Kentucky Derby and the Louisville Slugger baseball bat, is a city of opportunity and change. Like many American urban areas in the 21st century, Louisville has its share of economically distressed neighborhoods where families struggle to survive and raise their children.

Louisville is one of the *Making Connections* sites, and since 1995 it has been part of a community child protection initiative funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. Louisville calls the Clark initiative Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, and it targets the communities served by Neighborhood Place Ujima (Swahili for "collective work and responsibility"). Based in a former public school, Ujima offers families a central spot for a range of services, from health care and Head Start to counseling.

From the beginning, communication was linked to the goals of the initiative: changing the understanding of how to prevent child abuse and neglect and building a shared responsibility between the child protection agency and the community. This meant a comprehensive strategy was needed to reach out and engage families and organizations in the Ujima neighborhood.

A Plan

The first stage was to develop a strategic communication plan, a working (and dynamic) document that led the effort through the first few years. A team of volunteers set itself up as the communication working team. The Clark Foundation made a grant to Martin & Glantz, an independent communication firm, to provide technical assistance. Martin & Glantz advised the Louisville team as it wrote the communication plan and conducted training in public speaking and media relations. Martin & Glantz also developed an activity-planning guide and a communication kit that highlighted a range of possible activities, giving the advantages and disadvantages of each. *(The kit and guide are available from Martin & Glantz, see Resources, page 47.)*

On a national level, the Clark Foundation produced a number of materials that were used in Louisville:

- a booklet, *We Are In This Together: Community Child Protection in America;*
- an information packet, *Community Partnerships for Protecting Children;* and
- a 13-minute video, *Joining Hands*, that features Louisville and was shown at local events.

Louisville's communication plan listed the key issues faced by families in the Ujima neighborhood: isolation, substance abuse, domestic violence, lack of preventive help, and a need for parenting supports. The communication plan also listed the assets in the community: caring parents, the children themselves,

natural helpers, and a collaborative environment of organizations at the local level. These were their first target audiences. They added others: Child Protective Services staff, businesses, policymakers, health care providers, the courts, and the media.

They held focus groups of neighborhood residents and community leaders and developed a theme, "Keeping Children Safe is *Everyone's* Business," that appeared on all of their materials. They produced flyers and brochures. They built a website. They ran radio spots, put up billboards and ads, and conducted door-to-door canvassing. They held an immunization fair and business roundtables. They produced tote bags, banners, magnets, pencils, and nightlights.

In addition to staging its own events, members of the Louisville communication group set their sights on virtually every regular public function in the neighborhood—fairs, festivals, workshops, and more. This was a low-cost way to spread materials and messages to almost everyone in the community. They also targeted and recruited volunteers—from the police, the fire department, churches, bowling leagues, and fraternal organizations.

When the steering committee targeted educational neglect as an early warning sign of family problems, the communication team held a picnic for parents whose children had missed too many school days during the previous year. The invitation letter made the point that this was a special event for a special group of children. At the picnic, to which almost every invited parent came, the children were entertained and the parents discussed the value of education and talked about local services to help struggling families. There was plenty of food.

The Mechanics

The communication work group reported regularly to the steering committee and was initially chaired by a member of the steering committee; the current co-chair is outreach coordinator at Neighborhood Place Ujima. (This link between communication and site leadership is a critical one.) The group celebrated regularly and thanked everyone who volunteered and worked on events and the campaign.

The cost of all of this activity was amazingly low. The former chair of the communication work group estimates that they spent only about $15,000 a year. This was augmented by in-kind donations, a lot of shoe leather on the part of volunteers, and some sharing of funds with community organizing activities. The Clark Foundation paid for the nationally distributed materials and supported the work of Martin & Glantz with a grant.

Lessons

When asked to reflect on what they learned about communication in five years, Louisville team members mentioned a number of points:

+ The formal strategic planning process that led to a completed communication plan meant they were forced to define their communication vision and tie it to their overall vision.
+ The training and materials provided by the foundation and the outside consulting firm were helpful in planning and in dissemination.
+ Engaging volunteers not only helped spread the message about community child protection, but also expanded the group that could make referrals to support vulnerable families.
+ They got major leverage from conversation and material distributed at events such as street festivals, a minority job fair, and children's day at the zoo.

Their one major concern was inadequate resources, which meant they couldn't do all that they had planned. They had also hoped to get pro bono

or inexpensive marketing and advertising expertise, but were not successful. They felt they needed to add people with specific skills to the mix of their communication work group, people who know things like the cost of paid radio spots, how to place ads and announcements, and how to write copy.

Although they tracked the progress of their activities through informal surveys and interviews, there was no formal evaluation of the impact of the communication work, nor was it part of the foundation's early evaluation studies. They know how many volunteers they recruited and how many people they

HOW TO put out a NEWS RELEASE

A news release is the vehicle for alerting multiple media outlets to an event, agenda, campaign, etc. It's a brief written explanation of your plans. You can mail, fax, or e-mail it to reporters. (If you are suggesting a story idea to one specific reporter, you need not write a news release. But you should have basic written information available.) "I might have 30 seconds to spend on a news release," says Paul Day, a reporter for KCNC-TV in Denver, adding that the important information should "leap off the page."

The standard format for a news release is:

- In the top left corner, type "For Immediate Release."
- In the top right corner, type the date.
- Below "For Immediate Release," type the names and phone numbers of two contacts. Make sure these contacts can be easily reached by phone.
- Type a headline on the release. This can be up to four lines, if necessary. Include as much essential information as possible.
- Emphasize what's unique: the first, the biggest, etc. Be creative.
- Write short paragraphs of one to three sentences.
- Write the release like a news story, with the information in descending order of importance. One page maximum.
- Spend 75 percent of your time writing the headline and first paragraph.
- The release should answer Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. You can write these words on the left side of the page and answer them on the right.
- Type "—30—" or "###" to indicate the end of your release.
- Type the release on the letterhead of an organization.
- Briefly describe the organization in the last paragraph of the release.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

sports events, neighborhood murals, potluck dinners, block parties, computer classes, street banners, buttons

reached at specific events. And they know what materials were distributed, to whom, where messages appeared, and who was likely to hear or see them. They recognize that the impact of their work is tied to the impact of the overall initiative. A future task will be to try and measure more specifically the impact of the communication effort.

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B. MEDINA, OHIO—PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE POWER OF LISTENING

Sometimes a public engagement strategy isn't designed from the beginning as a communication effort. Rather it evolves as a natural response to an event or events. This was the case in Medina, Ohio, when a community member threatened a lawsuit over a painting of Jesus Christ that had hung in a local elementary school for more than 50 years. The way the superintendent handled this crisis yields lessons in public engagement that reach far beyond crisis management.

Once a farming area with some small manufacturing, Medina is now a fast-growing town with many newcomers who commute to nearby Akron and Cleveland. Despite the growth, however, the town retains a sense of community pride and conservative values. When the painting of Jesus took a starring role in a public furor, the school system quickly realized it was in violation of the U.S. Constitution by displaying the painting. The media were on top of the story. The American Civil Liberties Union was prepared to join the fray. A lawsuit would be costly, and the school system was unlikely to win.

There were strong—and vocal—opinions on both sides of the issue, and Superintendent Charles Irish realized he was in the midst of a cultural war. But rather than exercising his leadership by imposing a decision, he decided to listen first. He and the board of education sat down with groups and individuals all over town. They didn't argue. They just listened. And as they learned to listen with depth and patience, they realized that the real issue wasn't where to hang the painting at all. The real concern was a perceived loss of values in the community. As one woman put it, "When I see all this trash on TV and listen to it on the radio ... and then when I'm told that we can't have a picture of Jesus in school, I feel like we're losing."

That recognition led Irish to a recommendation that went far beyond where to put the painting itself. He suggested moving the painting to a church across the street and putting a plaque on the wall of the school where it had hung. But more important, he suggested refocusing the energy of the community to look at commonly held values and figure out how those values could be integrated into the school curriculum and school life. Little has been said about the painting since then, but a values curriculum is in place, developed by people who were on both sides of the argument.

Community Values and Communication

Irish's public engagement approach didn't come out of the blue. Since coming to Medina, he had been struggling with contentious funding issues and a failed levy, with a high school overcrowding problem, and with curriculum debates. In each of these, he learned to deliberately reach out to teachers, administrators, and the citizens of Medina and engage them, as he put it, in a "brutally honest discussion about the current and future state of our schools."

ways and means of communicating: subway and bus ads, street theater, display booths at fairs or conventions,

One of the most controversial issues was whether to build a second high school to solve major overcrowding in the current one. A series of community meetings yielded no ready solutions. People were adamant that they wanted only one high school that would never exceed 1500 students, yet projections indicated a student body of 2400 students in the near future.

The district kept its public engagement strategy alive with a commitment to listen and allow the community to wrestle out loud with its thinking. Irish learned not to force a solution, which would only polarize opinion. "Good public opinion is what we want," he said later, "and it exists only when the community accepts responsibility for its views. To get to that point, a community must work through its understandings of the issues and chew on them in the context of personal values."

Irish and the Board of Education met in living rooms with more than 500 community members, drinking coffee and eating a lot of fattening cookies, as he pointed out. They followed these informal conversations with four in-depth focus groups. After all this listening, they were able to identify six key values expressed in the community:

- **Community unity**. Citizens expressed a desire to preserve the close-knit feeling in the town.
- **More personal education**. They believed that the high school was becoming too big and impersonal.
- **Equity**. The town didn't want to be divided into "haves" and "have nots."
- **Long-term solutions**. Residents wanted a lasting solution and didn't want to have to repeat this process every few years.
- **Frugality**. They wanted a cost-effective solution that would also add value.
- **Community partnerships**. They wanted to partner with other community institutions to create the extra services they perceived to be missing in their schools.

Irish and the board found that a solution arose naturally from these values. The district's proposal would keep only one high school, but expand the building structure to accommodate 2400 students in the near future, with plans to expand to 3600 if necessary in the more distant future. The single high school would then be broken down into four separate houses of 600 students each, and students would progress from grades nine to 12 in the same house. Each house would have its own teachers, advisors, counselors, and principal who would work with the same 600 students over four years. This proposed solution addressed five of the six values that the community had expressed.

The sixth value, community partnerships to provide the extras, came into play as Irish and the board sought out meetings with city officials, the hospital, a performing arts foundation, Akron University, and the public library. In the end, the city would become a partner in building a new recreation center, with sports facilities for students. The hospital would add a physical therapy branch to the center. The performing arts foundation would construct a 1200-seat, state-of-the-art auditorium, and Akron University would bring more university classes to Medina. Only the library backed out and declined a role.

Irish and the board then went back to the community and engaged them in a discussion of the proposed solution. The project, he said, became "the talk of the town, and a tremendously energized citizenry ensured its passage."

school newspapers, ads in programs, key rings, buttons, family suppers, night lights, preprinted Rolodex cards

Lessons

The drive for informed resolution is a classic component of public engagement. Irish did not use traditional communication tools in either of these efforts. He did not prepare handouts or materials, nor did he seek out the media, although he was open with the press on request. The district did do several communitywide surveys, with open-ended questions, during the course of the discussions. But the basis of the strategy was the series of small discussions. Irish took the first five minutes of each meeting to explain the facts as objectively as he could and to ask residents how they felt about them. Then he listened.

By listening, Irish and the board gained the community's trust. As he reported later, "We confronted our fears over conflict, then we listened to the concerns of the community and responded in a meaningful way. By engaging in honest communication with the community instead of politicizing the issues, we solved our problem."

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C. YAKIMA, WASHINGTON—USING COMMUNITY RADIO TO INVOLVE PARENTS IN EDUCATION

Getting parents involved in their children's schools is a challenge in most communities, but it is particularly

how to use

COMMUNITY CALENDARS

and public service announcements

If you have an event you'd like included in the community calendars of newspapers or other media, use the style of a news release to distribute the information. Tell them who, what, when, where, and why in a clear and concise way. Label the release, "Calendar Item" and make sure you send it to the appropriate people at news outlets. Find out which news organizations—print and broadcast—in your community have calendars listing community events, and become familiar with them. Calendar editors want to hear from you. Getting your information is their job.

- Send in most calendar items at least two weeks in advance.
- Double-check your dates, times, locations, etc.
- Don't forget your local cable access station and commercial TV stations.
- Ask if color photos are accepted.

Many broadcast outlets will air information about nonprofit causes (health tips, safety information) and events (rallies, lectures). Even commercial television stations run video public service announcements—albeit seldom in prime time. For TV stations, contact the public affairs director. At radio stations, call the DJs directly and ask them to read your information on the air, even if they don't normally read news.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

ways and means of communicating: bus shelter ads, photos projected on buildings, messages on grocery bags,

difficult in areas where there are large numbers of families who speak little English at home and where parents often feel unwelcome and uncomfortable in their children's schools. In Washington State, however, a community radio station and a statewide business coalition are determined to conquer this obstacle through a strategic communication effort.

Yakima Valley, a rich agricultural region in the south-central part of the state, is home to a large Spanish-speaking population, most of them farmworkers, many of them migrants. KDNA, also known as Radio Cadena (the Spanish word for a chain or net comprised of links), is a public Spanish radio station that reaches 60,000 Spanish-speaking residents in the Yakima community with information, music, and news. The Partnership for Learning, based in Seattle and supported by Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Washington Mutual, is a statewide, nonprofit business coalition with a single mission: to build understanding of the state's school-improvement effort. Together, KDNA and the partnership illustrate the power of radio as a communication tool in reaching parents and children around educational issues.

The Partnership for Learning was formed in 1994 when the state legislature mandated higher standards. The group works in nine communities across the state, one of them Yakima, and it uses a variety of communication tools to build awareness, including conversations at community meetings, parent guides, newsletters, flyers, research papers, and a website.

To reach Spanish-speaking families, the partnership at first simply translated materials into Spanish and distributed them. But it realized that print materials were not the most effective way to reach families who sometimes had reading limitations even in their first language. Radio, on the other hand, reaches everyone, and it reaches them wherever they are; many listen at work, in the car, and at home.

Together, KDNA and the partnership produced a variety of programs about education:

- **Informational capsules**. Similar to public service announcements, these are very short, one-issue segments. Usually they consist of a single voice, like that of a mother who says she always makes sure her children do their homework before playing, even though she can't read the homework in English.
- **Mini-dramas**. Like small soap operas, these are real conversations, 90 seconds to two-and-a-half minutes long. In one example, a daughter asks her mother to go to parents' night at her school. The mother says she can't because she doesn't speak English, and she wouldn't know what to say. The daughter says the school has translators now, and besides, her teacher speaks Spanish. At the end of the conversation, the mother says she'll try it and that she, too, wants to learn English.
- **Half-hour, prerecorded programs**. These are longer discussions of key educational issues and can go into more depth on topics like the new state tests and how parents can help children learn to love learning, etc.
- **One-hour call-in programs**. These programs invite lively participation from parents, students, and educators.

The radio programming in Yakima is augmented by personal outreach. The general manager of KDNA goes to school meetings and makes presentations at migrant conferences and other special events. KDNA and the partnership hand out simple flyers in Spanish, including tips for parents. They attend meetings for parents at the schools and health fairs and talk about testing and standards. Often these meetings are timed to coincide with other popular events, such as a mariachi band concert, to increase participation.

KDNA and the partnership also developed an audiocassette with children's music on one side and a discussion of the value of education on the other. The conversation featured a well-known KDNA radio character, *El Viejito* (the old one), as well as a school administrator who does migrant outreach, and others. The cassettes were distributed at special events, health fairs, and schools.

The cost of the campaign is shared by KDNA and the partnership, but it is not large. The programming at KDNA costs about $14,000 a year; costs are shared by the radio station, the partnership, and 11 participating school districts in the region. The partnership provides the flyers and other print materials.

Lessons

The collaboration between KDNA and the Partnership for Learning is a showcase for some of the best principles of strategic communication: They reach Spanish-speaking families on familiar turf—a Spanish radio station that has 21 years of history of service to the community. They are responsive to the needs of the audience and how best to reach it. They use a variety of radio programs and other tools that are innovative and engaging and build on popular programming. They seek input from community and school meetings and from call-in shows where people feel comfortable expressing their views. And the partnership, which is learning from the successes in Yakima, plans to take those lessons to other places in the state.

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D. LEGACY—TELEVISION AS A CATALYST FOR CONVERSATION

Television can spark community conversation, public education, and social change, particularly when it combines compelling storytelling with an accurate depiction of complex, real-life issues. *Legacy*, a 90-minute documentary scheduled for airing on HBO cable television in the spring of 2001, is just such an opportunity. It can be used in any of the *Making Connections* sites to start a conversation that focuses on the connection between strong communities and strong families.

Legacy is the story of the Collins family of Chicago. It begins with the shooting death of 14-year-old Terrell Collins, a straight-A student who seemed destined to make it out of poverty. The film follows Terrell's extended family members over five years as they give voice to their grief and their struggle to find the strength to transform their lives. What makes this documentary particularly relevant for the *Making Connections* sites is the web of community organizations and support services that directly contributed to the success story of the Collins family.

The documentary starts as the extended Collins family struggles to live in a community infused with poverty and violence. Yet *Legacy* is the story of

- a grandmother raising her grandchildren in a public housing project, which she subsequently leaves behind when she becomes a homeowner in a safe neighborhood;

ways and means of communicating: live on-line discussions, community screenings of documentary films, spiritual

- a mother who is recovering from substance abuse and assumes full care of her children for the first time;
- an aunt who breaks free from welfare, finds a job teaching kindergarten, pursues her high school equivalency degree, and is working on her teaching certificate;
- a cousin who succeeds in high school, has strong mentors, goes to college, gets married, and has solid career goals for her future; and
- the support of the church, the education system, a bank, a home-building program, and community job training for various family members.

The *Legacy* documentary is the centerpiece of a national outreach campaign aimed at engaging organizations, neighborhood residents, and local media. HBO is supporting advance distribution of the 90-minute documentary for community screenings. The outreach campaign is designed to stimulate conversation about the complex issues of urban poverty and how families and neighborhoods can grow and change through supportive networks. Such a dialogue is a key communication tool and can help participants who watch this documentary identify issues for action in their own neighborhoods. The video also creates the opportunity for conversations across disciplines—housing and faith-based organizations, for example, coming together on common ground.

Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that designs and implements educational and community outreach campaigns primarily for the telecommunications industry, is directing the effort nationally and in several *Making Connections* sites. In Detroit, for example, *Making Connections* community leaders are using *Legacy* to help churches and schools build a common conversation. And in San Diego, KPBS, the local public television station, is working with *Making Connections* members to explore solutions around the themes covered in *Legacy*. This includes a screening and an event for substance abuse and recovery agencies to be hosted by KPBS, Cox Cable (the HBO outlet), and P.O.W.E.R., an agency that assists women in recovery. To launch its involvement with the *Legacy* campaign, KPBS hosted an event for community leaders to highlight a related video, *Legacy of Community Action*, and its own production, *Welfare's Missing Dads*.

The national *Legacy* outreach campaign offers a range of materials for sites to use, including

- the full-length, 90-minute documentary, in English or with Spanish subtitles;
- two 35-minute videos: *Legacy of Community Action* and *Legacy of Faith* to support discussion and action;
- a website, *www.legacymovie.com*; and
- a *Legacy Community Action Toolbox*, available on the website, which examines the issues and target audiences in depth.

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E. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND POLICY CHANGE—HANDGUN VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUTH IN CALIFORNIA

In the mid 1990s, youth homicide was rising fast across the country. California was no exception. In this large state, homicide was the leading cause of death for young men between 15 and 24; it was the

second leading cause of death for 10- to 14-year-old males. Politicians took a hard line, pushing for stricter laws to try juveniles as adults and incarcerate them for longer periods of time.

The California Wellness Foundation wanted to reduce the violence against youth by preventing it. As part of a $60 million, 10-year effort, it funded a comprehensive public education campaign to inform opinion leaders, policymakers, and the general public about policies to reduce injury and death from guns and to shift the general opinions of youth from perpetrators of violence to victims of violence, from being the problem to being part of the solution. The goal was to reframe gun violence as a public health issue.

The first stage of the campaign, conducted by Martin & Glantz of California, a communication firm, began with a statewide survey of public opinion about handguns and gun violence against young people. Bolstered by the finding that a large majority of Californians were concerned about the availability of guns, the firm convened a team of strategy experts and designed a multimedia public education campaign. It compiled a database of some 14,000 opinion leaders across the state and a specific outreach plan for each field that the opinion leaders represented. Comprehensive data packets were prepared and sent to opinion leaders and politicians. Other tools included both paid and unpaid public service announcements, direct mail, telephone contact, and special events.

One of the most influential events was an interactive, statewide video conference. Not only did the

HOW TO hold a NEWS CONFERENCE

When many citizens think of "publicity," what pops into their minds is "news conference." In reality, a news conference is usually the wrong way to attract the media. It's a much better idea to call reporters individually and fax them information. But news conferences may be the right approach if you expect significant coverage. Whenever possible, hold press conferences outside, with backup arrangements for bad weather. That way, you don't have to worry about providing electricity for lights and cameras.

- Assign someone to greet reporters; write their names on a sign-in sheet.
- Keep it to four speakers, maximum. Limit speeches to five minutes. Put your most important speakers first. Cut off speakers who run on too long.
- Speakers should dress in formal clothes, unless they are in costumes.
- Allow 10 minutes for questions. The whole thing is over in 30 minutes.
- Make sure your amplification system is adequate.
- Photographers frequently arrive early to try to catch a candid photo.
- If only a few reporters arrive on time, delay five minutes, then begin.
- Practice the news conference in advance, including questions.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

more than 1500 participants see that they were part of a large, concerned movement, but participants also added a new idea to the mix: introducing and passing local gun-control ordinances in their own hometowns. This helped push the public education campaign in a new direction, and the foundation gathered and distributed information about existing ordinances.

Phase Two

In 1997, the foundation launched the next phase of the public education campaign with a goal of increasing resources for prevention of violence against youth and continuing to shift the public's view of young people from being the problem to being part of the solution. That phase of the campaign is still in progress.

Because gun violence is a volatile issue and the foundation's initiative has many elements, it is hard to assess the effectiveness of the communication components separately. However, there are some positive indicators. Between 1996 and 1998, 67 cities and six counties in the state enacted 183 gun control ordinances. In addition, politicians running for public office often adopted the language of the initiative as their own. Two of the main messages were heard repeatedly across the state: "Handguns are the number one killer of kids," and "There are more gun dealers in the state of California than there are McDonald's fast food restaurants." After two of the television commercials aired in five media markets in 1997, almost 10,000 viewers requested copies of a "Citizen Involvement Kit." A grassroots network of violence prevention advocates was formed to keep state and local officials focused on these issues. In 1999 the governor signed a package of tough gun control laws. The legislature is spending more on violence prevention programs, and public attitudes have moved significantly in the direction of seeing youth as victims, as opposed to perpetrators.

Lessons

The California Wellness Foundation spent several million dollars on this public education campaign. A comprehensive communication strategy in a state as large as California about a topic as politically charged as youth violence and gun control will inevitably be expensive.

There are lessons, however, that can be applied to more focused, less expensive campaigns. The strategy was well planned and included the advice of experts from the beginning. It used surveys to help inform development of messages. The campaign itself was multifaceted, with components ranging from television ads to direct mail to citizen information packets. Opinion leaders and policymakers were identified by name and contacted individually, something much easier to do on a local level than statewide. Each mailing had a response card for follow-up. When opinion leaders made suggestions for policy change, their ideas were listened to and integrated into the campaign. The communicators followed up by doing research on good ideas and distributing information across the state. Feedback along the way led to new ideas and new opportunities to communicate.

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F. HIGHBRIDGE HORIZON—THE POWER OF A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Highbridge is a community in the South Bronx, New York, named after the High Bridge, a graceful 1848 aqueduct that links the Bronx to Manhattan. An

area of hills, fresh air, and country villas during the 19th century, Highbridge became heavily urbanized and home to a diverse population in the 20th century.

Between 1965 and 1990, the South Bronx and Highbridge faced hard times. Population decreased by 50 percent, and more than 20 percent of the housing stock was lost to arson or abandonment. Crime soared, and jobs disappeared. But the spirit of Highbridge held on, and by the mid 1990s, Highbridge was "on the rise," as residents say. Abandoned and burned-out buildings were being rehabbed. Community development organizations invested more than $600 million in housing across the South Bronx, including Highbridge. These groups hired thousands of people to do the work and provided a range of social services to residents. The Highbridge Community Life Center (HCLC), a nonprofit community-based organization, was one of the leaders working to create a brighter future for residents.

In December 1998, HCLC started a local newspaper, *Highbridge Horizon*. Printed in English and Spanish, the paper focuses very specifically on the issues and needs of Southern Highbridge. The paper is produced by residents and funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation as part of its Neighborhood Partners Initiative; the Pascale Sykes Foundation provides additional funding.

A community newspaper is a way to communicate locally, right down to the block level, and to talk about issues that affect the lives of the families who live there. Poor and geographically isolated, Highbridge is rarely covered in the mainstream press; yet there is much to discuss in this thriving and changing community in the South Bronx. Residents were uniform in their demands for more communication, and a community newspaper was a viable solution.

HCLC and the Clark Foundation also saw the paper as part of a larger communication strategy that would help residents learn valuable, marketable communication skills, enhance their leadership capacity, strengthen bonds among residents, and help community members speak to the larger world. The paper identified the specific goal of involving neighborhood youth. As the first issue of *Highbridge Horizon* stated, the publication was "dedicated to giving young people a voice and platform to express themselves. They will contribute to every aspect of the paper. We intend to not only develop their communication skills, but get them involved in community affairs."

Getting Results

The paper takes on nitty-gritty community issues, from housing to community gardens to the police. The first issue led with an article on residents' demands for speed humps to curtail speeding cars in front of an elementary school. Numerous accidents had injured children on that block, and the neighborhood had been asking for speed humps for four years. Two months after the article appeared, residents got the speed humps.

Other editions of *Highbridge Horizon* took the local police precinct to task for not answering the phone (they answer now) and confronted recalcitrant or absentee landlords (a regular feature is "Eyesore of the Month"). In an effort to draw attention to unrepaired potholes, the paper gave school children cameras, sidewalk chalk, and decorations and sent them on a quest to decorate potholes for Halloween. The photos were published with the phone number of the local Department of Transportation, so that no "ghoulish pothole" would go unreported. The result? The potholes were fixed.

ways and means of communicating: telephone surveys, news conferences, neighborhood directories, web video,

Technical Assistance

The first editor reached out to other community newspapers in the Bronx; two of them were particularly helpful in offering start-up advice. In addition, the Clark Foundation's communication consultant, Kitty Barnes, brought in mentors to offer technical assistance for the new journalists. Weekly workshops focused on reporting, research, graphic design, photography, basic computer skills, desktop publishing, public relations, advertising, and public speaking. The Highbridge Horizon team, each of whom applied for internships at the paper, ranged in age from teens to sixties.

Distribution was informal at first. Interns and volunteers put copies in doorways of buildings, in local bodegas, laundromats, and churches. Now they've added newspaper boxes on the streets and are also mailing it to selected people in the community and the city.

The main costs to produce *Highbridge Horizon* were for printing ($12,000 a year) and technical assistance ($15,000 the first year). Other costs were small, and some equipment and services were donated. The first editor was a Vista volunteer; his salary was later covered by an Open Society Community Fellowship. The current editor has a salary, but the rest of the staff volunteer their time.

In January 2000, the paper went from a monthly to a bimonthly and is now taking ads. Recently the paper's staff brought in additional advisors from UPS to help develop a business strategy so that the paper can become self-sustaining. Kitty Barnes estimates that the paper will be self-supporting within three years.

Beyond a Newspaper

Once the paper was going strong, participants in the communication workshops decided to broaden coverage of the neighborhood by producing a history of Highbridge. In the local library, members of the group found (and had restored) old community photos, many of them crumbling. They identified the locations and took current photos on the same blocks. They wrote essays and interviewed residents, looking at the past, the present, and the future of Highbridge.

The then-and-now photos, essays, and interviews were mounted for an exhibition called "Collective Inspiration." HCLC hosted an opening party, and participants practiced the skills they had learned in the workshops, including public speaking, advertising, and public relations. They promoted the party through the Internet, radio, letters, phone calls, and flyers.

Everyone attending the opening was greeted at the door by the Highbridge Ambassadors, a group of 6- to 8-year-olds, who gave roses to all of the elders (in their view, anyone over 30). A panel of *real* elders spoke of their memories of Highbridge. Residents read their poetry. Everyone sang. About 300 people attended, former and current residents, including teachers, police officers, and public officials. The fire department arrived late, their uniforms smelling of smoke; they had just put out a fire.

Six months after the exhibit, the workshop participants produced a publication, also called *Collective Inspiration*, based on the material. The "book launch" was the occasion for another community-wide celebration hosted by HCLC. Copies were distributed to residents, community leaders, and selected public officials.

Lessons

A community newspaper is a small communication investment with a potentially large return. In Highbridge, it has had a real impact on the spirit of the community as well as on some of the issues residents grapple with every day, from potholes to police. It has also taught residents new skills. And

the paper led to new projects and events that brought the whole community together to celebrate. *Highbridge Horizon* is now a highly visible partner in this community that is "on the rise."

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G. NEW ORLEANS, MANCHESTER, VENICE—INTEGRATING THE ARTS INTO COMMUNICATION

For sites that explicitly aim to help residents get in touch with their community, the arts offer many opportunities. The arts can help make difficult concepts more interesting. People who don't care for formal policy discussions may be more likely to go to the theater or an exhibition or even to participate in the arts. Concerts are an excellent way to reach youth.

The arts bring a different kind of imagination to an initiative. Messages can be explicit or embedded in music or theater or dance. And with mime, music, or dance, you can reach people who speak different languages and come from different cultural backgrounds.

Marketing is often one-way communication, telling people what they should think or do. The arts can inspire, involve, and invigorate; the arts help people feel and believe. The arts can also add an element of fun to a site's communication efforts. Creativity and fun, in turn, promote collaboration. A bonus is that the mainstream media often cover artistic events; it's hard to resist a good photo-op.

Take a mapping project, for example, where families actually draw a large, detailed map of their neighborhood, complete with buildings, vacant lots, community gardens, and polluted or cleaned-up rivers or streams. For starters, participants learn the assets and problems in their community. And once the map is completed, it can be displayed at local meetings, photographed for the print media, and used as a backdrop for television interviews.

Teens who interview their neighbors on videotape not only develop skill in videography, but also the ability to do a "newsreel" at community events and lead a discussion. An intergenerational storytelling workshop about the neighborhood's history can inform young residents and increase everyone's commitment to change. A mural can engage a large group of residents, each of whom paints a small section.

Publicity is key to the success of arts projects. Posters, ads, flyers, press releases, photographs, and street banners can spread the word. So can word of mouth. The more people who are involved in actually *doing* the arts, the easier it is to get audiences—their friends and families are delighted to come.

New Orleans Photo Exhibit

New Orleans, a cultural Mecca, always does things with panache. That was certainly true with "The Ties That Bind: Making Family New Orleans Style," a photo exhibit that attracted citywide attention. Combining the art of a well-known photographer with that of ten up-and-coming ones, the exhibit at the Ashé Cultural Arts Center was the occasion to celebrate families in Central City, a predominantly African-American community of some 20,000 people in uptown New Orleans. The exhibit was also the occasion to launch the *Making Connections* initiative in New Orleans.

In New Orleans, like anywhere else in America, people sometimes take families for granted. As Carol Bebelle, director of the Ashé Center says, "We find 'the family of the heart' mostly in our memories. But our busy lives sometimes keep us from transferring it to the present." The exhibit changed that, at least for many of the 5000 people, young and old, who came to visit and ended up participating and digging deeper into the meaning of family ties.

Bebelle explained that they wanted the exhibit to spread the message that family is "where your leaning side is propped up." In New Orleans, this means birth families and chosen families. It means the extended families of aunts, uncles, cousins, and godparents. It means cultural families like the Mardi Gras Indians, a tradition that goes back to the sanctuary provided by Native Americans for African Americans during slavery. Family in Central City includes the religious families of the church communities.

To promote the exhibit, coordinators at the Ashé Cultural Arts Center used posters, flyers, radio, newspaper inserts, and sale of their photo catalogue. Their target audiences were residents of Central City, churches, schools, businesses, political leaders, and foundations.

The exhibit was successful in and of itself, but good communication planning meant that it became much more than a series of photos on the wall. The Ashé Center hosted previews for press and members of other groups—arts and community organizations, educators, religious groups, and youth leaders. The *New Orleans Tribune* ran a cover story on the exhibit, and it was featured in other local media, both print and television. The Ashé Center prepared a study guide for teachers and took school children through the exhibit, prompting them to discuss their reaction to the photos. One particular photo of a woman dancing on a coffin led to animated conversation about New Orleans funeral traditions. And funerals, of course, are about family.

The exhibit was like a magnet in the community, and the center became the location of choice for celebrations ranging from baby showers to funerals, from birthdays to high school graduations. The center hosted workshops connected to local jazz and music festivals, school events, and tourism meetings. The Essence Music Festival premiered "Ties That Bind II," a second exhibit that added photos submitted by neighborhood families.

The exhibit led to a series of family suppers, where families from all over New Orleans convened around the concept of family. Here the conversation is directed far beyond the definition of families to the current status of families living in the city. Residents start with stories of their own families, then look more broadly at what families in general need. They develop a common definition of family and examine economic issues, parenting, discipline, and the role of government. They discuss solutions to community problems. The Agenda for Children sponsors the dinners, with the first one held at Ashé. When the series of initial suppers is completed, Bebelle will help convene a family reunion of all the participants and report back on the strategies the communities created.

Culture and the arts are an integral part of New Orleans society. "The Ties That Bind" exhibit was more than an icebreaker for a conversation about families in Central City. It showed that art, when included in a communication strategy, can be a direct link to community involvement.

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voice mail, message boards, business cards, whistles, web photo exhibits, web video, window signs in stores

Streets Ahead

In Manchester, England, the arts have been used to celebrate and promote safe streets in the inner city. Manchester recently came through a serious economic depression. Textile mills closed, and the city center deteriorated. Downtown Manchester was largely abandoned at night, except for the young singles crowd, who spent their time in bars and pubs. Families did not feel comfortable there and, as a result, they rarely visited.

Streets Ahead was launched in Manchester in 1995 as an annual series of arts and street performing events during the month of May. Each year, hundreds of performers take over downtown streets and squares, and thousands of citizens of all ages come to watch and participate. The key messages of Streets Ahead—"a family-friendly city" and "families in the city at night"—have the goal of bringing the city center alive as a safe place for families and people of all ages.

People parade through downtown streets, have coffee, shop, watch street performances, and participate in a range of activities culminating each year in a night of fireworks and carnival. Events include street theater, music, dance, a circus, comedy, puppetry, sidewalk painters, and more. Traffic is blocked, as people and families stroll freely from one event to another.

Produced by the nonprofit group Manchester International Arts, each year's celebration highlights different events. The festivities are promoted with flyers, street banners, pennants, ads in bus shelters, a website, and radio.

In May 1999, Manchester burst into song with a weekend celebration called Heaven and Earth. Participants from 40 local choirs and choruses, school singing groups, a sign language choir, and a gospel choir filled the city center with singing. Voices rose from the streets and drifted down from rooftops, bringing music from "heaven" to "earth" and back again. Singers perched on ladders and hung out of windows. Choruses rang back and forth, from one building to another. The music ranged from African call-and-response songs to Native American chants, from East European songs to British pop and folk. The musical choices were reflective of Manchester's diversity.

Heaven and Earth was not expensive. Promotional costs were shared with other events that were part of Streets Ahead festivities. The singers volunteered their time. A coordinator, educator Mary Clark, was brought in from New York City; she and a technical director were paid. The organizers also had to pay for some rehearsal space. It is difficult to separate out the specific costs for Heaven and Earth, but Clark estimates it was approximately $10,000. Funding came from local businesses and merchants, national British arts councils, universities, and corporate sponsorships. The exposure and attention received were worth far more than $10,000.

The overall effort contributed to a movement in Manchester toward more pedestrian streets. And the city is changing. Two new pedestrian squares have been created since Streets Ahead began. Derelict textile mills are being turned into apartments. A 24-hour entertainment complex center opened in the fall of 2000. There is still a long way to go to make the city center a family-friendly place 12 months of the year. But Streets Ahead, with events like Heaven and Earth, has pushed the transition toward a safe, thriving city center for residents of all ages and cultures.

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ways and means of communicating: "branding," walking tours of the neighborhoods, arts festivals, tote bags,

how to STAGE an EVENT

Media events can be used to call attention to any issue. If you provide interesting visuals and a strong message, the media will come. Television news, in particular, will seldom cover a story without a strong visual element. "The most imaginative and theatrical people are going to win," says Colin Covert, a feature reporter at the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis. "Don't expect good intentions to get you space. The fact that you're trying to fight cancer is great, but it's not news. If you do something interesting, we'll write about it."

PETITIONS. Signed petitions should be delivered in a way that creates an image and drama for the news media. Consider putting petitions inside something (e.g., a coffin, trash can, or symbol of your issue).

REPORTS AND RESEARCH. Reporters are interested in fresh statistics and new information. Link reports about your issue with visual images for the widest coverage. Hold a news conference to display your visual image and your report.

BANNERS. Signs and banners make news. Activists have climbed existing billboards and covered them with their own banners; dropped banners from construction sites; put letters on people's shirts (one letter per shirt) and made a human banner; and placed photos of women who have had breast cancer on a banner. A simple sign, offered at the right time, can be extremely effective.

CELEBRITIES. Take advantage of our society's obsession with sports and Hollywood. Finding a celebrity or notable person to endorse your cause or speak at your event can be difficult, but it's worth the effort. Sometimes when a celebrity takes up a cause, suddenly, everything changes. Support comes out of nowhere. Your position becomes credible.

NOTHING SPECIAL. Often, you don't need to create a special event for journalists. Simply let them know when your organization is doing something interesting, particularly if it has visual appeal. Every day, nonprofit groups are doing interesting things, but too frequently staff and volunteers forget about letting the news media know. Almost any community activity—even a meeting—can make news.

SOURCE: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants.

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Community Murals in California

The Social and Public Art Resources Center (SPARC) in Venice, California, is a center for community art making, education, and mural preservation. SPARC was founded by muralist Judy Baca, famous for producing the longest mural in the world, the Great Wall of Los Angeles, a half-mile of colorful paintings along the walls of a flood-control channel. The wall, which depicts the history of Los Angeles, engaged 400 young people and countless scholars, oral historians, local artists, and community residents.

Baca believes community participation, including involvement of youth, is pivotal to socially responsible art making. SPARC shows how visual arts can be a communication project as well as good art. Participants of all ages collaborate on a common project, learn cultural and factual history, share stories about their community with residents from other communities, and develop works of art that foster understanding and dialogue for years to come.

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ways and means of communicating: testimony at public hearings, web sites, press releases, public engagement,

A. SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

A Client's Guide to Hispanic Marketing, published by the American Association of Advertising Agencies. Hispanics are the fastest growing consumer market in the United States. This booklet, although geared to commercial marketing, discusses the Hispanic audience and why it's important to understand the nuances of this diverse population in marketing efforts. $35 from AAAA, 405 Lexington Avenue, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10174-1801, 212-682-2500, *www.aaaa.org*.

Best Practices Toolkit: Communications Tools for Social Change, by the Benton Foundation. This toolkit is aimed at nonprofit practitioners trying to make the most of communication technology to achieve social change. The complete toolkit with annotated information is available on line at *www.benton.org/Practice/Toolkit*.

Communications and Social Change: A Position Paper and Conference Report, January 1999. This paper and its companion from an earlier conference, are published on line by the Rockefeller Foundation. The focus is on communication for international development, but the vision and concepts are relevant in the U.S. as well. Download from the foundation's website, *www.rockfound.org/publications.html*.

Communications Kit for the Community Partnerships for the Protection of Children, and **Community Child Protection Activity Planning Guide,** by Martin & Glantz, for the Children's Program of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. Two toolkits to help communicators brainstorm creative ways and occasions to communicate. The first kit lists advantages and limitations of everything from magnets to neighborhood newsletters. For copies, contact Martin & Glantz, 888 17th Street, NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20006, 202-296-7010.

Communication Strategies for Making Effective Connections: An Intercultural Communication Toolkit, by Our Voices Consultants. A paper written for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Includes an analysis and guidelines for communicating in multicultural communities. Discusses racism, the importance of effective listening, and how to ask supportive questions. Available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202, 410-547-6600, *www.aecf.org*.

The Co-Motion Guide to Youth-Led Social Change, by Leigh Dingerson and Sarah H. Hay. Published in 1998 by the Alliance for Justice in Washington, this 250-page volume is a soup-to-nuts manual for communication and message building at the community level. Although the book is geared to teenagers and young community organizers, it is a useful piece of work for anyone interested in these issues—full of case studies, real examples, anecdotes, and proven strategies. Also contains an extensive bibliography of additional resources from other organizations. Available at a nominal cost from the Alliance for Justice, 11 Dupont Circle, NW, 2nd Floor, Washington, DC 20036, 202-822-6070, *www.afj.org/pubs.html*

Computer and Communications Use in Low-Income Communities: Models for the Neighborhood Transformation and Family Development Initiative, by Laura Breeden, Steve Cisler, Vivian Guilfoy, Michael Roberts, and Antonia Stone, published by the Community Technology Centers Network. A survey of five community programs that offer technology access and education to low-income Americans. Download from *www.ctcnet.org/casey*.

Connect for Kids, a weekly electronic newsletter. Includes information for parents and advocates, including a section on community building. A project of the Benton Foundation. To subscribe, send a blank

e-mail to *subscribe-kids-weekly@connectforkids.org*, or sign up on line at *http://www.connectforkids.org/listserv1579/listserv.htm*.

Effective Language for Discussing Early Childhood Education and Policy, a publication of the Benton Foundation in cooperation with the University of Washington's Human Services Policy Center. Using surveys and focus group data, the report helps parents and advocates frame children's issues to encourage better media coverage. Download free from *www.benton.org/stratcom/*.

Engineers of the Imagination, edited by Tony Coult and Baz Kershaw, Methuen Books. A hands-on guide to the basic techniques of community theater: making processions, large-scale puppets, fixed structures, food, music, etc. For ordering information, see *www.methuen.co.uk/engineersofimagination.html*.

Expecting Success: How Standards Can Raise Student Performance, a 14-minute video and facilitator's guide produced by the Collaborative Communications Group and Hancock Productions. One of a series of tools to engage parents in school reform through use of standards. Collaborative Communications also has an on-line public engagement toolkit that helps build parent and community support for academic standards. See *www.publicengagement.com*.

Family to Family: Strategic Communications, Media Relations for Child Welfare, one of a series of handbooks for the Family to Family initiative to reform foster care. Order or download from *www.aecf.org/familytofamily/order.htm*.

Grantmakers Communications Manual, by Christopher McNamara, published by the Council on Foundations and the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers. A basic guide that includes an argument about why communicating is important, detailed chapters on video production and PSAs, a chapter on crisis communications, and a section on educational meetings with legislators. For ordering information, see *www.cof.org*.

In Other Words: A Plea for Plain Speaking in Foundations, by Tony Proscio. Published by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. An argument for jargon-free materials in foundation communications. Available free of charge on request from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 250 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10177, 212-551-9100.

Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communications for Nonprofits, by Kathy Bonk, Henry Griggs, and Emily Tynes, a publication of the Communications Consortium Media Center, Jossey-Bass Publishers. A practical, nuts-and-bolts guide to working with the media to enhance visibility, achieve social reform, recruit members, influence opinion leaders, and more. Includes information on polling, handling crises, and training parents to speak to the media. See *www.josseybass.com/catalog*.

Legacy, an outreach kit for the 90-minute video of the same name, and two accompanying 35-minute videos. This outreach campaign is discussed in the Promising Approaches section of this guide. For more information on the campaign, see *www.legacymovie.com*

Losing Ground Bit by Bit: Low-Income Communities in the Information Age, published in 1998 for the Benton Foundation's Communications Policy and Practice series. An excellent overview of new digital communication technologies and their impact on poor neighborhoods, with one of the best resource listings available anywhere. Available on line at *www.benton.org/Library/Low-Income* or order a copy from *shop.benton.org*.

Making Television Matter, a publication of the Benton Foundation. Shows how documentary films can engage and mobilize communities. Read on line at *www.benton.org/MakingTelevisionMatter* or order a copy from *shop.benton.org*.

ways and means of communicating: videos, book clubs, conferences, "buzz," door-to-door surveys, flyers,

Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists, by Jason Salzman, Westview Press. A how-to primer on media and getting quality coverage. Perseus Books Group, 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, CO 80301, 800-386-5656, *www.westviewpress.com.*

News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media, by Lawrence Wallack, Katie Woodruff, Laurie Dorfman, and Iris Diaz. Sage Publications. A blueprint for working with the news media to advance social change. For ordering information, see *www.sagepub.com.*

On-Line Content for Low-Income and Underserved Americans: The Digital Divide's New Frontier, a report of the Children's Partnership. A major study of 1000 websites, interviews with more than 100 low-income Internet users, and 100 community technology leaders and experts. The report makes specific recommendations to promote an Internet that includes appropriate content for underserved Americans. Download from *www.childrenspartnership.org/bbar.search.html.*

Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change: A Report of the Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement for Public Education, published by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. An analysis of public engagement as a strategy to achieve school reform. Includes many examples. For ordering information, see *www.aisr.brown.edu/publications/publications.html.*

Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Organizations: Seven Steps to Creating a Successful Plan, by Janel M. Radtke, John Wiley and Sons. A comprehensive and straightforward guide to communication planning, complete with worksheets, tips, checklists, and a floppy disk. For ordering information, see *www.catalog.wiley.com.*

Telling a Foundation's Story: Nuts and Bolts for New Health Foundations, the proceedings of a workshop sponsored by Grantmakers in Health and the Support Center for Health Foundations. Outlines reasons to communicate and a range of strategies. Download from *www.gih.org/pubs/w_oct97/title.htm.*

Telling Stories, Saving Lives, The fall 2000 issue of the Ford Foundation's quarterly magazine focuses on storytelling and the arts. Order or read on-line at *www.fordfound.org.*

Toolkit, published by the Center for Communications and Community at UCLA. Includes both text and video components and is designed to build communication capacity at the local level for organizations that want to be more strategic about media. Sample papers in the kit include "Reframing Community Messages through Myths and Metaphors," by Susan Bales of FrameWorks Institute, "The Challenge of Covering Community News," by Los Angeles *Times* reporter Edward Boyer, "Media Advocacy and Neighborhood Transition," by communication consultant Karen Y. Stevenson. Download from *www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/ccc/toolkit.htm.*

We Did It Ourselves: Guidelines for Successful Community Collaboration by the Sierra Health Foundation. A three-volume set of booklets reflecting on a 10-year initiative of the Sierra Health Foundation in Northern California. The initiative, called Community Partnerships for Healthy Children, is designed to promote the health and well-being of children and their families by supporting community-based collaboratives. The first volume focuses on an asset-based approach to community engagement; the second is a guide to evaluation; and the third is about communication. Includes sample materials and boilerplate examples. Cost: $50. *www.sierrahealth.org/publications.html.*

B. SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES

Alliance for Community Media is a membership organization dedicated to universal access to electronic media. The alliance represents the interests of more than 1000 public, educational, and government access organizations and public access Internet centers throughout the country. It works through public education, legislation and regulations, coalitions, and support of local organizing: *www.alliancecm.org*.

Association for Community Networking, based in Boulder, Colorado, maintains a website dedicated to chronicling and supporting the use of community-based websites: *http://bcn.boulder.co.us/afcn/cn/index.html*. The site provides links to approximately 150 sites around the country.

Benton Foundation *(www.benton.org)*, based in Washington, D.C., works to shape the emerging communication environment so that it supports the public interest. Bridging the worlds of philanthropy, policy, and community action, Benton focuses on three areas: defining and promoting public policies; helping nonprofit organizations use communication tools and strategies; and creating knowledge centers in the new media. The organization produces numerous publications (some of which are cited in this report), facilitates websites, and is a leader in the effort to bridge the digital divide. Three Benton programs are directly relevant to *Making Connections:* Connect for Kids *(www.connectforkids.org)*, a website and electronic newsletter on issues of concern to families and children; Sound Partners for Community Health *(www.soundpart ners.org)*, which helps public radio stations highlight community health needs and support public involvement in health care policy; and Open Studio: The Arts Online *(www.openstudio.org)*, which provides training in the arts to communities across the country and trains artists and arts organizations to use the Internet for communication, publication, and creative expression.

Center for Communications and Community, University of California, Los Angeles, is a service, research, and training institute that looks at the intersection of communication, race, and community transformation. The center has four core missions: to build the capacity of community-based organizations to integrate communication into their ongoing policy work; to encourage and foster stronger relationships between journalists and community organizations; to develop a multidisciplinary research agenda around the impact of news media on public attitudes; and to build alliances among community stakeholders, neighborhood residents, journalists, policymakers, scholars, and opinion leaders to help move "public will." Its toolkit is listed above under publications. See *www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/ccc*.

Communications Network, an affinity group of the Council on Foundations, is a nonprofit membership organization of foundation officers who work to include communication as an integral part of effective grantmaking. Based in Washington, D.C., the network hosts regular conferences and briefings and publishes and disseminates key articles on philanthropy and communication. Future plans include on-line communication training. See the website, *www.comnet work.org*.

Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet) is a network of more than 400 community technology centers across the country. CTCNet is committed to a society in which "all people are equitably empowered by technology skills and usage." The organization helps network members build the capacity to provide access and education to its communities. It offers conferences, a leadership institute, and publications. See the website, *www.ctcnet.org*.

ways and means of communicating: extranet, block parties, conferences, open-mike poetry slams (poetry readings),

Digital Divide Network aims "to enable and facilitate the sharing of ideas, information and creative solutions among industry partners, private foundations, nonprofit organizations and governments." Led by the Benton Foundation in association with the National Urban League, the Digital Divide Network seeks to build new and diverse partnerships to address the critical issue of access to technology. In profiles and research papers, the website highlights a variety of voices, from the smallest nonprofits to the largest corporations and foundations. The site also has a section on how to get funding to support digital divide solutions. See *www.digital divide network.org*.

FrameWorks Institute is an interdisciplinary communications research firm that runs communication campaigns for communities and studies media portrayal and its effects on public perception. The organization looks at public opinion, focus groups, linguistic analysis, and how stories are framed in the media. FrameWorks also develops "message memos" that offer advice on developing effective messages. "Reframing Youth Issues for Public Consideration and Support," a paper by FrameWorks founder Susan Nall Bales, can be found on line at *www.connectforkids.org/usr_doc/reframingytb.html*. The institute developed a series of e-zines for KIDS COUNT sites about how to talk about children's issues: *http://216.4.58.61/frameworks*. FrameWorks Institute, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 901, Washington, DC 20036, *www.frameworks.org*.

Public Agenda Foundation, founded by Daniel Yankelovich and Cyrus Vance, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit public opinion research organization based in New York City. The foundation does in-depth analyses and studies of public opinion on major policy issues, such as education reform, attitudes toward children, health care, crime, and the environment. A recent study relevant to *Making Connections* sites showed that substantial majorities of Americans have negative opinions about young people, particularly teens, and that public judgment of parents is getting harsher. Public Agenda Foundation, 6 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016, *www.publicagenda.org*.

resource GUIDES

As part of the *Making Connections* Technical Assistance/ Resource Center, the following Resource Guides are scheduled to be produced before the end of 2001:

Economic Opportunities for Families

- Connecting Families to Jobs
- Building Family Assets

Enhancing Social Networks

- Family Support
- Residents Engaged in Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods

Building High-Quality Services and Supports

- Building More Effective Community Schools
- Community Safety and Justice
- Child Care for Communities
- Meeting the Housing Needs of Families
- Community Partnerships to Support Families
- Improving Health Care for Children and Families
- Developing Community Responses to Domestic Violence

Techniques for Advancing a Family Strengthening Agenda in Neighborhoods

- Using Strategic Communication to Support Families and Neighborhoods
- Connecting Families to Computers and On-Line Networks
- Outcomes-Based Accountability

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